US envoy Ricciardone leaves to open embassy in Iraq

Story on Page A2

EU envoys buck death penalty; to visit Munti

By Jerome Aning
and Blanche S. Rivera

EUROPEAN ambassadors and other diplomats are scheduled to visit the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa City today to visit death row inmates and to convey their governments' opposition to the death penalty.

The scheduled two-hour visit comes

EU ENVOYS/ A9

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Politicians told: Keep out of Iloilo festival

By Ma. Diosa Labiste
PDI Visayas Bureau

HALA BIRA!
PWERA POLITIKA!
LUSOT AKO

ILOILO CITY—It may be close to impossible, but organizers of this year's "Dinagyang Festival" in Iloilo want the celebration to be

POLITICIANS/ A9

Thursday, January 15, 2004 ★★★ ~~54~~ 46 pages / 5 sections / vol. 19 / P15 website: www.inq7.net

High court stops Meralco rate hike

Lopez firm told to reply to petition of consumers

By Philip C. Tubeza
and Ronnel W. Domingo

A RELIEF for consumers for now. Acting on a petition by civic advocacy groups, the Supreme Court has temporarily stopped the Manila Electric Co. from charging its four million customers in Metro Manila and nearby provinces starting Jan. 1 an average increase of 12 centavos per kilowatt hour.

The provisional rate increase that the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) approved last Nov. 27 without public hearing was expected to give the country's biggest electricity distributor this year P2 billion in additional revenue with which it plans to pay its debts and finance expansion projects.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered Meralco and the ERC to "observe the status quo prevailing" before the Freedom from Debt Coalition and several party-list representatives asked the tribunal to intervene last Dec. 23.

The ruling on the rate increase was not

HIGH COURT/ A8

Osmeña claims P2B greased SSS bank deal

By Michael L. Ubac
and Ronnel W. Domingo

P2 BILLION "changed hands" to facilitate the controversial sale by the Social Security System of its 29-percent stake in Equitable PCI-Bank to Banco de Oro for P8.17 billion, opposition Sen. Sergio Osmeña III alleged yesterday.

"This is a sad day because some people have told me that about P2 billion changed hands," Osmeña said in a privilege speech at the Senate.

He, however, refused to identify those who benefited from the deal. "But we will unmask them during the inquiry," Osmeña said.

In his privilege speech, Osmeña asked the Senate to immediately start an inquiry into the "stupid" deal, saying the SSS failed to conduct a "transparent" public bidding.

"This is too big an amount to be allowed to go unexamined. When something of this magnitude comes out, it would be better to have conducted public bidding for the simple reason that this is a very choice public share."

But in a briefing yesterday, top SSS officials justified the sale, saying it was the best deal the SSS had made in recent years from which it expects to earn some P14.7 billion in the next six and a half years.

"The deal may not be popular but it is the right thing to do. It is such a good deal for SSS," said SSS president Corazon de la Paz, adding that in fact, she had been receiving plaudits from finance experts and investment houses regarding the deal.

SSS sold its 187.8 million shares in Equitable-PCIBank to Banco de Oro at P43.50 per share on Dec. 29, 2003, or P10 more than the stock's last trading price at P33.50 before the sale. Yesterday, its share price closed at P43.

OSMEÑA/ A8

Abalos says raps baseless, unfair

By Martin P. Marfil

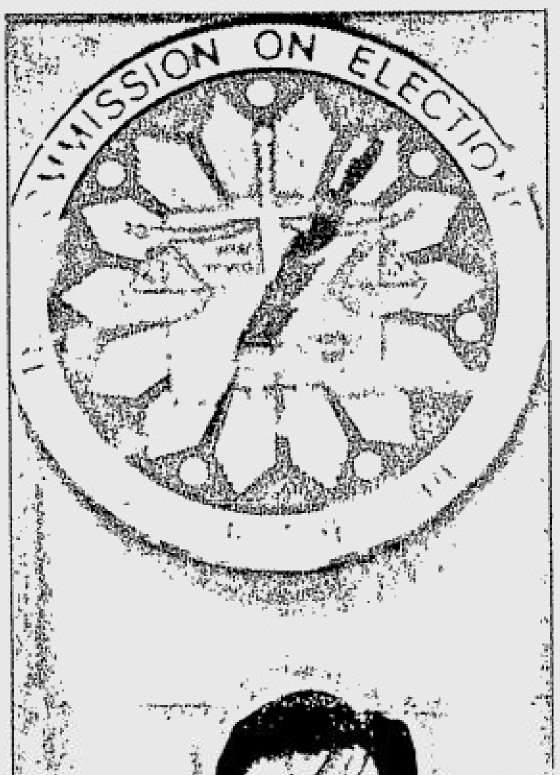
COMMISSION on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos yesterday denied reports alleging that he packaged the controversial P1.3-billion automated machine contract voided by the Supreme Court, saying that he did not even know the "Korean supplier-friend" whom he supposedly knew when he was still the head of the Metro Manila Development Authority.

At a press briefing, Abalos said that he was also surprised by the allegation that he had a "friend" who helped him packaged the deal.

"I don't even know these (SK C&C Co. Ltd.) people. That I was with (him in the) MMDA and that he was a friend. I don't know whom the report was referring to," he said.

"Sometimes, people weave stories ... Please, when you write stories like these, check

ABALOS/ A10



Comelec to fight SC decision

By Martin P. Marfil

THEY are staying put.

Officials of the Commission on Elections are not resigning but plan to fight the Supreme Court decision to "clear their names."

"No one is resigning. At least two are retiring," Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos said yesterday.

Abalos said quitting would be tantamount to an admission of guilt.

Following the Supreme Court decision voiding the P1.3-billion contract the Comelec awarded to the Mega Pa-

COMELEC/ A10

STILL on top even if Abalos is under fire. (Above) Baguio's 900 ballot boxes inventoried by custodian Luz Ambanloc are full of ballots from the last elections that have to be destroyed before May.

VINCENT CABREZA/PDI NORTHERN LUZON BUREAU

Gov't plays down US probe of telecom firms

OFFICIALS and analysts yesterday played down a surprise US investigation into practices at Philippine telecom firms, saying it is unlikely to alter agreements with US firms to raise the rates they are charged for inbound calls.

The US justice department served 30 Filipino telecom executives who were attending a conference in Hawaii last weekend with subpoenas to appear before a grand jury in Honolulu.

The US action revived a dispute between American and Filipino telecom firms over termination rates, which are paid by domestic carriers to complete calls on the networks of foreign carriers.

But Jorge Sarmiento, deputy head of the National Telecommunications Commission, played down the likely impact of the probe on the recently agreed 33-percent hike in rates that US companies are charged to connect international calls.

"The termination rates have been mutually agreed upon," Sarmiento told Reuters. "Would this mean that they would have to alter that? No, that is a private transaction and not likely to be changed."

GOV'T/ A8

Gov't vows to hold polls on May 10

By Juliet Labog-Javellana
and Christine O. Avendaño

HOURS after the Supreme Court voided the P1.3-billion computer contract, an emergency meeting was called Tuesday night in Malacañang where President Macapagal-Arroyo, leaders of Congress and Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos agreed to shift from the planned nationwide automation to the old method of manual elections.

They also agreed that the elections should be held as scheduled on May 10, Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. said yesterday. Senate President Franklin Drilon said preparations were under way for the shift back to the manual system.

"We agreed that we will squelch all moves for a no-election (No-El) or postponement-of-election scenario. We agreed to ensure that the elections will go

GOV'T/ A10

2 lawmakers warn vs 'No-El' plot

By Carlito Pablo
and Christian V. Esguerra

WITH the Supreme Court nullifying a contract entered into by the Commission on Elections for automated polls, two party-list lawmakers yesterday warned of a possible No-El (no elections) plot on one hand or a failure of elections or massive fraud on the other.

"The condition has been set for a possible No-El scenario," Sanlakas Rep. JV Bautista said, adding that to justify a No-El scenario, the Comelec could file a motion for reconsideration before the Supreme Court, thereby "causing delay in preparations for May 10."

"[The Comelec] may insist that it cannot conduct the elections as scheduled, or the commissioners may be forced to resign," Bautista said.

This could "only benefit" President Macapagal-Arroyo "if she and her political lieutenants feel that they could lose the elections."

In a separate interview, Akbayan Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales said "the only reason" the administration would not go ahead with the elections was "if the Pres-

2 LAWMAKERS/ A10

LIFELESS DOLPHIN
A spectacular beauty even as it lies lifeless along the shores of Matina, Pangi, Davao City, this 19-foot long dolphin is the biggest so far seen in the area.

BING GONZALES/ PDI MINDANAO BUREAU

E-mail: pr_news@inquirer.com.ph

Second FRONT PAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Northern and Eastern Luzon will experience cloudy skies with rains. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/01/15/04

Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	**Iloilo/Bacolod**	Partly Cloudy
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	**Roxas**	Partly Cloudy
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	**Cebu**	Partly Cloudy
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	**Tacloban**	Partly Cloudy
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	**Gen. Santos**	Partly Cloudy
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	**Zamboanga**	Partly Cloudy
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	**Cagayan de Oro**	Partly Cloudy
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	**Davao**	Partly Cloudy

Let FPJ run, says Lakas solon

By Carlito Pablo and Dona Pazzibugan

AN ADMINISTRATION congressman yesterday warned of "public indignation" if movie star Fernando Poe Jr. were to be disqualified from running for President on "unwarranted and unreasonable" grounds.

Negros Oriental Rep. Jacinto Paras said the best course of action would be to simply allow Poe, whose Filipino citizenship is being questioned, to pursue his presidential bid.

"Why should we risk the perception that the administration is afraid of him, hence the disqualification?" he said.

Paras pointed out that President Macapagal-Arroyo herself has said that Poe is a Filipino citizen even though Poe is her toughest rival.

"Let him run and see if he is acceptable to the public as another actor like him, Joseph Estrada. I believe the public has already learned a lesson with Erap," he said.

Paras said the President, with her wide experience in governance, can hold her own in the elections against the popular actor.

The Comelec is set to start hearings this week on a petition alleging that Poe is an American citizen like his mother, having been born out of wedlock.

The Poe camp argues that Poe's father, who was an American citizen, had acquired Filipino citizenship and by operation of the laws, his children were also Filipinos.

They said the actor's father was a decorated soldier who fought in World War II.

Lakas Rep. Prospero Nograles countered that the war record of Poe's father was "irrelevant."

"The citizenship issue is a matter of documentary evidence and not proven by medals of bravery and honor in war," he said.

Nograles said the Poe camp should "meet the legal issues squarely by furnishing documents of Poe's citizenship."

An urban poor group, Amalustre, and lawyers Albert Villaseca and Melanio Balayan said they would file criminal charges of falsification and perjury against Poe today.

POE

It was learned that the groups will be using the same documents cited by lawyer Victorino Fornier in his disqualification petition against Poe before the Commission on Elections.

The groups allege that Poe falsified his birth certificate when he claimed to be a Filipino, and that he used "falsified documents" when he applied for a passport.

They said Poe also falsified his certificate of candidacy when he claimed to be a Filipino, and committed perjury when he swore under oath that he was a Filipino.

In his petition before the Comelec, Fornier used Poe's birth certificate and two other documents to back his claim that Poe is not a Filipino "since both of his parents are not Filipino citizens."

He produced a copy of a marriage contract between Poe's father Allan Fernando Poe Sr. and a woman (not Poe's mother) who filed a complaint for bigamy and concubinage against the senior Poe.

Fornier said while the actor's birth certificate indicated his nationality was Filipino, Poe Sr.'s marriage contract with a certain Paulita Gomez indicated he was a Spanish citizen.

Fornier said that even if his father were a Filipino, Poe could not have acquired Filipino citizenship from him since his father was not married to his mother, Bessie Kelley, an American.

Fornier also presented an English translation of Gomez's affidavit, written in Spanish and dated July 13, 1939, accusing Poe Sr. of bigamy and concubinage.

According to the marriage contract, Poe Sr. married Gomez on July 5, 1936.

Fornier said an illegitimate child follows the citizenship of the mother, so Poe is an American.

The 1987 Constitution says one must be a "natural-born citizen of the Philippines" to run for President.

Unfazed by the legal challenges coming his way, Poe said in a statement that he was continuing with his consultation meetings with various sectors to fine-tune his platform of government.

The actor will kick off his out-of-town sorties on Thursday with a visit to the Virgilio Milagrosa University in San Carlos City in his father's home province of Pangasinan, stated in the press statement issued by media coordinator Rod Reyes.

This will be followed by another visit to the University of Luzon in Dagupan City.

On Saturday, Poe will go to Baguio City to attend a multi-sectoral dialogue and lead the mass oath taking of members of the FPJ for President Movement there.

"*Tuloy-tuloy pa din, trabaho lang ng trabaho. Tuloy-tuloy lang ito* (We are going on, just carrying on with the work) ," Poe said during the fellowship night hosted by the KNP ticket in San Juan on Tuesday.

Among those who attended the fellowship night were Poe's wife, Susan Roces, his running mate, Sen. Loren Legarda, and some members of the KNP senatorial ticket.

Also present were his friends from the movie industry, comic star Dolphy, actors Eddie Garcia, Eddie Gutierrez, Robert Arevalo, Rudy Fernandez and Richard Gomez.

Roces said she supported her husband's candidacy and was prepared to take part in his campaign sorties.

"I'm here to support my husband," she said. *With a report from Cynthia Balana*

US envoy to RP assigned to Iraq

By Joan Orendain

UNITED STATES Ambassador Francis Joseph Ricciardone is scheduled to leave today for Washington DC en route to Iraq to open the US Embassy there, according to US Embassy sources.

A Middle East and Islam expert, Ricciardone, who was nominated by President George W. Bush envoy to the Philippines on Nov. 14 2001, four days before the first official visit to the US of the then newly-installed President Macapagal-Arroyo, is reported to have been assigned to head a US government team for Iraq's transition to democracy.

His wife Marie, a molecular biologist who was assigned to the State Department's environment office will leave in two weeks after packing their personal and household effects.

Ricciardone, 52, speaks, apart from English, four other languages: Italina, Turkish, Arabaic and French.

In the 1970s, he went to Iran as a teacher, traveling widely in Southwest Asia, Europe and the Middle East until he joined the US foreign service in 1978.

He served as deputy chief of mission and charge d' affaires in Turkey (1995 to 1999).

Before his stint in the Philippines, the 26-year veteran of the US foreign service served as director of the US State Department's Task Force on the coalition against terrorism.

He won a meritorious award as US Secretary of State Colin Powell's special coordinator for the transition of Iraq, a post that he held from 1999 to early 2000.

Business prefers manual count to poll postponement

THE PHILIPPINE Chamber of Commerce and Industry yesterday said elections should be held as scheduled despite the problems besetting the Commission on Elections after a contract for automatic counting was voided by the Supreme Court, as a postponement would prolong the climate of uncertainty and drive away investors.

"Postponing the upcoming elections to a later date will only hurt investors' confidence," said newly elected PCCI president Noemi Saludo in a statement.

She also said reverting to a manual counting of votes would be preferable to a postponement of the polls.

Other business leaders said that with a postponement, the country's business environment would continue to be less accommodating to investors.

Some members of the business community earlier said investments would be expected to rise and companies may push through with expansion plans when political and economic volatility eases after a new administration steps in.

Businessman Raul Concepcion earlier also said the economy is seen to improve after the elections when new government officials have settled down in their posts and businessmen do away with their wait-and-see stance.

Although the SC ruling was likely to suspend the automated counting of ballots during the May polls, the PCCI said it supported the court decision because pushing through with an activity tainted by irregularities would put the welfare of Filipino voters at risk.

"Given this circumstance, the Comelec should be able to restrategize its efforts to make sure that our elections will be credible and orderly. The business community will look into these developments in planning for our business prospects this year and the coming years," Saludo said in a statement.

Roberto Romulo, chair of Philam Insurance Co., said in a briefing it was "extremely disappointing" that despite the computer age, the country will again have to postpone automation and depend on manual counting of votes, which have been cited as one of the major stumbling blocks to fully honest elections. *Michelle V. Remo*

Lawyer wants Erap travel permit voided

By Armand N. Nocum

LIKE his knees, ousted President Joseph Estrada's reasons to travel abroad have turned to jelly.

"Why should he be allowed to go to the US?" Chief special prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio asked when he filed a manifestation asking the Sandiganbayan to withdraw its controversial Dec. 23 resolution allowing Estrada to go to the US for knee surgery.

"The basis for the resolution is non-existent,". Villa-Ignacio said in a telephone interview, pointing out that the former President scuttled on his deal with US surgeon Dr. Christopher Mow. He reportedly could not afford to pay Mow's $1.25 million surgical fee. Estrada's court-appointed lawyers said they are negotiating for other US doctors to operate on their client.

"With no specific doctor, no particular hospital and no definite time for the operation, the court should withdraw its resolution," said the chief prosecutor. "If we allow Estrada to leave, he would only go on a sight-seeing tour of Europe," he said.

Villa-Ignacio added that Estrada failed to comply with key conditions set by the court for his travel abroad. In its resolution, the anti-graft court asked the former President to submit the name of his doctor, the hospital where he will have his operation and the itinerary for his medical trip. Estrada failed to submit any information after his talks with Mow broke down.

The court also asked Estrada to execute a document saying that he recognizes the court's "unconditional" authority. Instead, Estrada declared that he was "submitting" himself to the court's authority out of force. He said he remains President.

The former President also failed to put up the P1 million travel bond.

Since Estrada violated the travel conditions, this renders the Dec. 23 resolution "void."

In his manifestation, Villa-Ignacio also attached the published commentary of former Senate President Jovito Salonga, who claimed that two justices were not designated by raffle and there was an absence of deliberation in the crafting of the Sandiganbayan resolution.

Should defense lawyers contest the content of Salonga's commentary, Villa-Ignacio said he will ask the court to summon Salonga to the hearing.

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Palace fires JIL member as NTC chief

MALACAÑANG flip-flopped on a previous decision yesterday when it kicked out a member of the President's Cabinet for no apparent reason after denying persistent rumors of the ouster just a day before.

National Telecommunications Commission chief Armi Jane Borje was advised yesterday afternoon by presidential search committee undersecretary Enrique Perez that she had been relieved of her position.

In a telephone interview, a tired Borje related that she did not want to react to the rumors until she had confirmation of whether or not these were true.

She had just arrived from an official trip to London Tuesday evening. *Abigail L. Ho*

Military bucks another truce with NPA rebs

By TJ Burgonio

THE MILITARY is objecting to the proposed ceasefire with communist rebels prior to the resumption of formal peace talks next month, citing the rebels' propensity to mount attacks despite a ceasefire agreement.

President Macapagal-Arroyo announced on Tuesday the resumption of formal peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front next month following an agreement between chief government negotiator Silvestre Bello III and his NDF counterpart Luis Jalandoni.

Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, Armed Forces vice chief of staff, said the military has relayed its reservations to the proposed ceasefire to the defense department, saying it would rather continue than suspend operations against the communist rebels.

Government troops will continue their assaults on New People's Army strongholds if necessary to protect infrastructure, businesses and political candidates ahead of this year's elections, the military said.

Adversarial stance

"The punitive actions would continue as long as there is no ceasefire," military spokesperson Lt. Col. Daniel Lucero said.

Garcia explained that the military's adversarial stance against a ceasefire stems from the recent order of Communist Party of the Philippines chair Jose Ma. Sison to NPA rebels to mount all-out offensives against government troops.

"It (ceasefire) does not jibe with the pronouncement of Jose Ma. Sison for an intensified conduct of atrocities on the people. They have, in fact, encouraged that there would be more offensives or terroristic activities that would be carried out by the NPA against the troops," Garcia said at a press briefing.

Last week, the rebels attacked a power plant in Batangas, a convoy carrying a congressman and a cell phone transmission tower to extort money and guns.

Rebel spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal has threatened more attacks against the government.

Garcia acknowledged that a "mutually agreed ceasefire" would lay the ground for successful negotiations, but added that even this could not be forged because of the "refusal of the other side to accede to this."

The Armed Forces, however, would abide by the decision of higher authorities on the issue, he added.

Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita on Tuesday voiced hopes the announcement on the resumption of talks would dissuade the guerrillas from further launching attacks.

Garcia also said that safe conduct passes previously issued to members of the NDF peace panel under the Joint Agreement on Security and Immunity Guarantees (Jasig) would still apply "unless there are new members of the NDF panel."

As part of the deal to resume talks, the government pledged to take steps to free detainees whose release has been demanded by the rebels. It also agreed to support indemnification claims by thousands of human rights victims under the Marcos dictatorship, including a proposal to Congress to pass a law appropriating at least P8 billion from the recovered $680 million ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses.

The government suspended the last round of peace talks in Oslo in 2001, after NPA guerrillas killed a former congressman they had accused of human rights violations.

The NDF has confirmed the scheduled resumption of the formal peace talks with the government next month as announced by the President.

No more delays

"The NDF holds the view that the resumption of formal talks is long overdue and hopes that no further delays would come from the GRP side which has been responsible for paralyzing the formal talks since June 2001," the NDF said.

In a statement furnished the INQUIRER, the NDF said the resumption of the aborted talks would be within the framework of The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992 and the subsequent agreements by both parties.

The government and the NDF have agreed on the following points: The Hague Joint Declaration and other agreements are reaffirmed as the foundation and framework of the peace negotiations. The outstanding issue of "terrorist" listing shall be resolved by undertaking effective measures in consonance with The Hague Joint Declaration and other agreements, and that full protection shall be afforded by pertinent provisions of said agreements and the Amado V. Hernandez doctrine on political offense. *With a report from Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau, AP*

What Drives You

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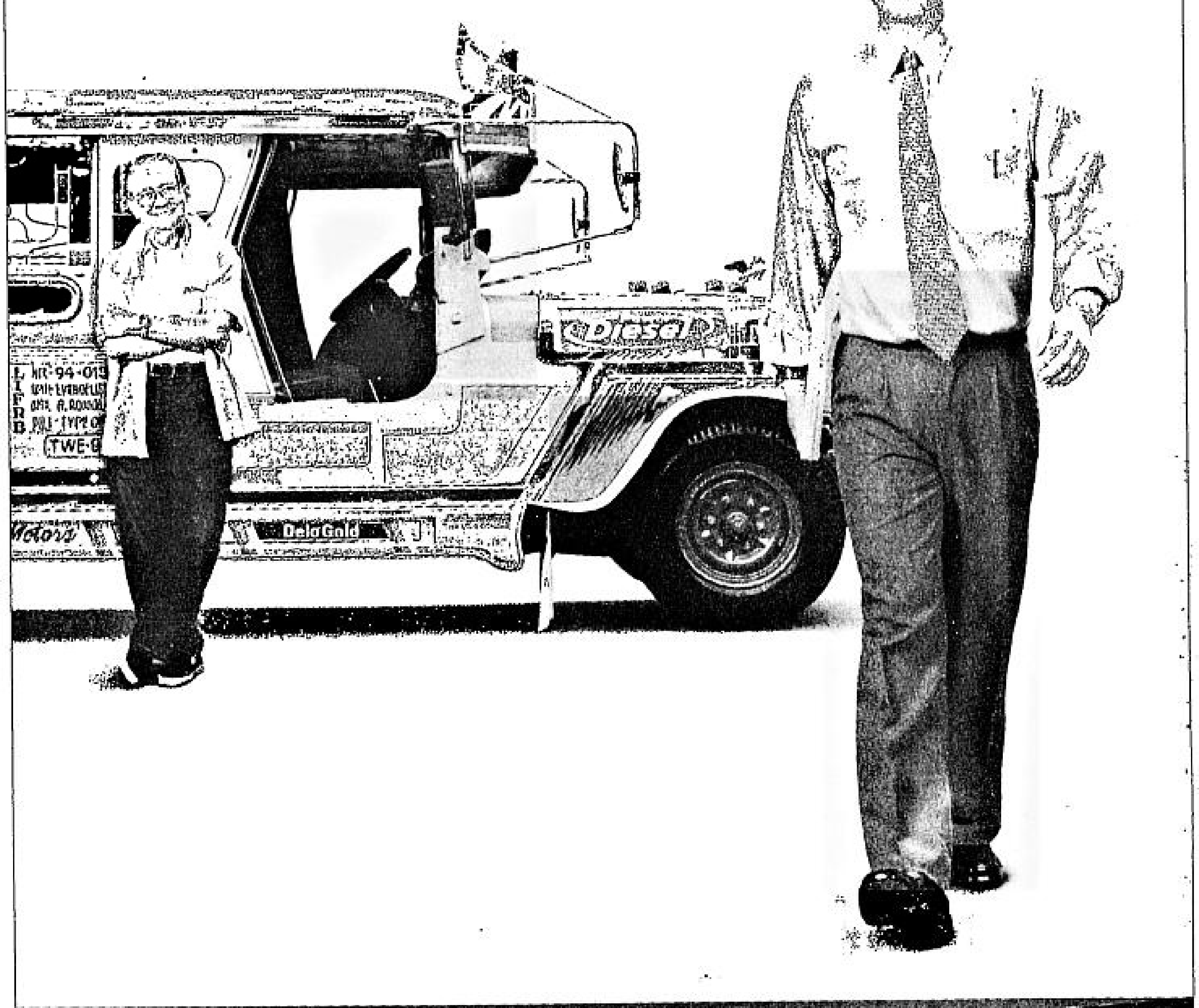

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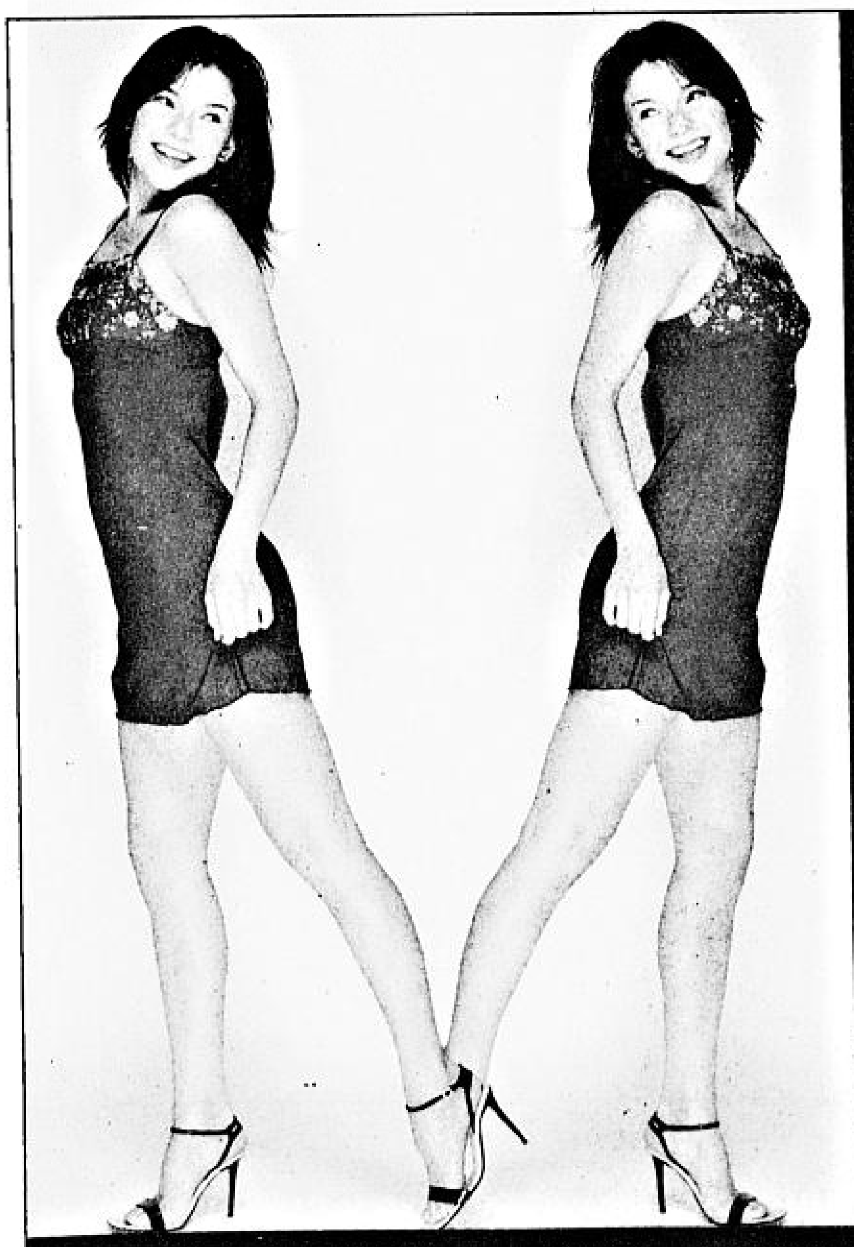

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Now, we have 2 Centers: The Haven for Women and The Haven for Street Children.

We've sheltered more than 6,000 women victims of rape, incest and forced prostitution. Today, we open a new center and new homes to care for thousands of abandoned drug-dependent street children.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo

House Speaker Jose de Venecia

DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman

CSFI President Gina de Venecia

For the past eight years, many small miracles have been unfolding away from the public eye—the miracle of renewal.

In the complex of cottages and buildings known as ***The Haven for Women***, tucked away on government land in Alabang, Muntinglupa City, this miracle has turned around the lives of more than 6,000 women victims of rape, incest, abuse, physical battering, and forced prostitution.

For years many women victims have had to endure their nightmares in silence, unreachable. In 1995 ***The Haven for Women*** opened its doors—and started breaking down the barrier.

Reaching out to them, ***The Haven for Women***—with the exceeding patience of its counselors, psychologists and caregivers—has succeeded in healing their trauma and putting their lives back in the daily rhythms of society.

For those who disappeared behind its doors—and emerged back to become triumphant wives, mothers, nurses, caregivers, and, in a few instances, teachers and nuns—the center has won their deepest gratitude.

High praises from Mrs. Clinton, PMs

The first of its kind in Asia, ***The Haven for Women*** has gained approving notice and acclamation from all sectors, here and abroad.

It has won plaudits from Prime Ministers, Presidents and Speakers of Parliament from the Asia-Pacific and high praises from former U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton—one of the most admired women of our time—in her remarks before 15,000 women during her Manila visit in November 1996.

And President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who was intimately involved with the center as Social Welfare Secretary, has acclaimed it. She provided the first inspiration for the Center.

From left: CSFI President Gina de Venecia, Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman, Former Pres. Cory Aquino, Speaker Jose de Venecia, and CSFI members lead the groundbreaking rites for the Haven for Street Children in Muntinlupa City.

The Haven for Women has 15 regional centers

So successful is ***The Haven for Women*** that each of the country's 15 regions asked for similar treatment centers. Thus, between 1995 and 2001, ***The Haven for Women*** built, opened and started operating 15 regional centers across the archipelago.

Today it has a 15-building complex in Alabang and 15 regional centers that are in full operation, including the expanded Alabang complex with six new buildings inaugurated today.

The driving force behind ***The Haven for Women*** has been the tireless Mrs. Gina de Venecia, President and Chairperson of the Congressional Spouses Foundation, Inc., and her colleagues.

The Haven for Women has risen, in the spiritual sense, on her vision and sense of mission and, in the practical sense, on the bigheartedness of Speaker Jose de Venecia—who has generously donated from his Countryside Development Funds for its construction. On its own the CSFI has regularly raised funds to build additional cottages and facilities from time to time, in a heart-warming and unprecedented partnership between the government and the private sector.

Princess Marie and daughter Princess Ratana of Cambodia greet infant children of residents in The Haven for Women, while Prince Norodom Ranarridh, Mrs. de Venecia, and Rep. Ruffy and Trina Blazon look on in the background.

A new mission: to rescue Greater Metro Manila's street children

Today, in another milestone, the CSFI turns its eyes to the tragic sector of street children—the orphans, abandoned, hungry, drug-dependent, and hopeless. President Arroyo, Secretary Soliman, and Mrs. de Venecia today inaugurate a nine-building complex, in another area of Alabang, christened ***The Haven for Street Children***. Its mission is to "rescue street children from desperation and helplessness."

In addition, three pilot regional sites of ***The Haven for Street Children*** have broken ground in Dagupan City, Pangasinan (Region 1), Solana, Cagayan (Region 2), and Tarlac City, Tarlac (Region 3) as a prelude to the establishment of similar sites in every region nationwide, like ***The Haven for Women***.

The new complex for street children offers a therapy center for emotional and physical rehabilitation, a guidance center for parents, a recreation center, and a livelihood center to teach them new skills and make them productive.

The new center signals a powerful new initiative to take these children—with ages from 6 to 12—off the harsh streets of Greater Metro Manila into the caring environment of ***The Haven for Street Children***.

For thousands of street children and for the nation, it is also a powerful symbol of hope—and of renewal.

Congressional spouses during one of their visits at the Haven for Women in Alabang. Photo shows, from left: Claudine Zialcita, Tessie Villarama, Louie Locsin, CSFI President Gina de Venecia, DSWD Secretary Dinky Soliman, and Rhodora Nograles.

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SC slams door on Marcoses on $683-M loot

IMEE Marcos with sons Borgy and playful Michael.

JOAN BONDOC

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE SUPREME COURT has slammed the door on the heirs of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, denying with finality a second motion for reconsideration from Imelda Marcos asking the high tribunal to reverse its July 15 ruling forfeiting $683 million in Marcos ill-gotten assets in favor of the government.

"No further pleadings will be entertained. Let entry of judgment be made in due course," the high court said in its resolution dated Dec. 9, 2003 but released only last Tuesday.

Lack of merit

This means that 15 days after Imelda is given a copy of the decision, the ruling will automatically be entered in the records of the SC making it final and executory.

The high court said it was denying for lack of merit Imelda's "motion for leave to file a second motion for reconsideration and for admission of second motion for reconsideration" filed on Dec. 2.

It noted that a second motion for reconsideration was a prohibited pleading under the Rules of Civil Procedures.

The high court had junked the Marcos heirs' first appeal on Nov. 18, 2003, voting unanimously to deny with finality various motions from the Marcoses asking the high tribunal to set aside its landmark ruling that the $683 million was ill-gotten and that the money should be forfeited in favor of the Philippine government.

'Global freeze' order

The SC also rejected a "global freeze" order on all Marcos assets issued by Hawaii District Court Judge Manuel Real, saying that it violated the high court's jurisdiction and public international law.

But on Jan. 8, Imelda again filed an omnibus motion before the high court opposing the government's motion asking the SC to issue a writ of execution to enforce the high court's July 15 judgement.

In the omnibus motion, lawyer Oliver Lozano asked the court to recall its "entry of judgment" order, reverse its July 15, 2003 verdict and return the case to the Sandiganbayan anti-graft court for a new trial on allegedly constitutional grounds.

Imee out, Boots Anson Roa in

By Christine Avendaño

THE OPPOSITION Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino finally completed last night its Senate slate by choosing veteran movie actress Boots Anson Roa as its 12th senatorial bet.

Leaders of KNP agreed last night to replace Ilocos Norte Rep. Imee Marcos who has opted not to run for the Senate in favor of a re-election bid with Roa.

Sen. Vicente Sotto III told the INQUIRER that Roa has accepted her nomination by the coalition to be part of its Senate slate.

Roa will file her certificate of candidacy before the Commission on Elections today, according to Sotto.

The KNP selected Roa from its standing shortlist of senatorial candidates which included former congressman Salvador "Sonny" Escudero.

Sotto said Roa can still replace Marcos as two people had filed candidacies for the slots and can be substituted by the party's final choices.

"We have until Friday to fill it up," Sotto told reporters.

Marcos yesterday finally declined an invitation from KNP presidential standard-bearer Fernando Poe Jr., saying it was not yet time for her to seek higher office.

In a press conference, Marcos said she made the decision after consulting with members of the Marcos family, including her mother, Imelda Marcos, who is said to have been opposed to her senatorial ambitions from the beginning.

Imee will instead run for a third and last term as representative of the second district of Ilocos Norte.

Her brother Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos will seek re-election as governor of the province.

According to Marcos, she was taking her time both as a congresswoman and a mother and would just wait for the "proper time" to seek a national mandate.

"To seek a seat in the Senate now would be an enterprise dictated by the terms of the times instead of other dreams," she said. *With a report from Cynthia D. Balana*

Leftists target 9 more House seats

By Norman Bordadora

MILITANT groups, tagged last year by President Macapagal-Arroyo as "legal communists" out to destabilize the government, are eyeing nine party-list seats in the House of Representatives.

Bayan Muna, which bagged three seats in Congress with 1.7 million votes in the 2001 elections, hopes to seat all of its five nominees in the House.

"We expect the votes for the mainstream leftist parties to double or even triple this time," said Bayan Muna secretary general Nathanael Santiago.

Also seeking party-list representation are: Anakpawis, a party of workers, peasants and urban poor groups; Migrante, made up of overseas Filipino workers and their respective families; Gabriela, which represents women's advocacies; Suara, a party of the Bangsamoro people; and Anak ng Bayan, a youth organization.

More progressive groups

"We decided to field more party-list organizations to increase the influence of progressive groups and broaden the representation of the marginalized sectors in the House of Representatives," said Bayan Muna president, Rep. Satur Ocampo.

"With only three of us in the House, our votes can only go so far. It would be better if there are more progressive groups in Congress," Ocampo added.

Ocampo's original Bayan Muna colleagues in the House—Crispin Beltran and Liza Masa—gave up their Bayan Muna seats in Congress to lead Anakpawis and Gabriela in the two groups' bid for party-list representation.

"These groups are our partners ... there would be coordination in the campaign to make sure all get the needed votes to be represented in the House," Ocampo said.

Of the five allies of Bayan Muna, only Anakpawis has been accredited by the Commission on Elections as a party-list candidate.

Bayan Muna has five nominees while Anakpawis has three. The four other groups are reportedly fielding one nominee each. If all the groups' nominees gain seats, there would be 12 seats for the militant groups—nine more than Bayan Muna's in the last Congress.

In its recent convention, Bayan Muna nominated its incumbent representative Ocampo and its secretary general Santiago, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan secretary general Teodoro Casiño, lawyer Neri Colmenares and incumbent Rep. Joel Virador, in that order.

Anakpawis, on the other hand, nominated former Bayan Muna Rep. Crispin Beltran, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas chair Rafael Mariano and urban poor leader Carmen Deunida.

Gabriela nominated former Bayan Muna Rep. Liza Masa while Migrante assigned its vice chair John Monterona.

Suara designated Muslim Christian People's Alliance officer Amirah Lidasan and Anak ng Bayan fielded Apolinario Alvarez.

After being allies in the post-Edsa II elections in 2001, Bayan Muna and the administration severed ties over differences in issues such as the government's peace process with the Communist Party of Philippines, the RP-US military exercises and the Philippines' participation in the US-led war against terrorism.

Bayan Muna has accused the government of systematic harassment, especially in the countryside, because of its alleged close ties with the outlawed Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army.

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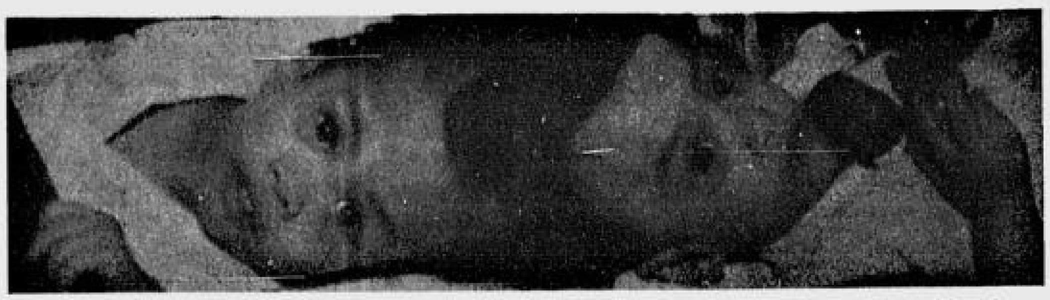
OPEN FOR FRANCHISE

Conjoined RP twins shiver in bitter NY winter

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—Conjoined twins Clarence and Carl Aguirre of Talisay, Negros Occidental, have caught a cold. Though covered with thick blankets, the twins continue to shiver in New York's frigid, winter weather. Doctors decided on a traditional remedy—chicken soup, a medical update from their hospital said yesterday.

"They each have an upper respiratory viral infection, also known as a very bad cold," said Dr. Robert Marion, their lead pediatrician at The Children's Hospital at Montefiore in New York. "And just like the rest of us, Carl and Clarence have been feeling miserable," Marion said in the medical update posted at the CHAM website.



THE CONJOINED Aguirre twins show signs of growth and good health despite having a bad cold as they await for the doctor's go-signal on their operation in New York. PDI FILE PHOTO

"In spite of their cold, Carl and Clarence continue to gain weight and grow stronger," Marion, however, assured.

The twins continue to receive nutrition, speech and physical therapies at Blythedale Children's Hospital where they were staying in between the series of surgeries at the CHAM that would eventually separate them.

The twin boys are physically joined at the top of their heads.

"Each day, the boys act more and more like children their age—they're now close to two years old," Marion said. "Their speech remains delayed but otherwise, Carl and Clarence have made tremendous progress since they arrived in this country on Sept. 10."

The boys' mother, nurse Arlene Aguirre, reported that her twins have gotten much stronger and are able to flip each other in the hospital crib and even change positions.

"When nurses come in the night to check on them, very often they're in reversed positions in bed," Aguirre said. "Now that they are becoming more aware of each other, they sometimes hold hands. But just like brothers, they also fight over toys."

Aguirre has been using a small video camera she received as a gift to document the brothers in their day-to-day activities. "Now they are able to see themselves and each other on TV," she said.

Asked when the next surgical separation procedure would be, Dr. James T. Goodrich, CHAM's pediatric neurosurgery chief and Dr. David Staffenberg, pediatric plastic surgery chief, maintain a "wait-and-see" approach.

They want the boys to completely heal from the two previous craniotomies before moving ahead, the doctors said.

The next few steps require more medical imaging, to map out the procedures toward final separation, a CHAM statement said.

"There is no fixed schedule for moving ahead," said Dr. Staffenberg. "As always, the boys themselves and how well they are doing, dictate how and when we will proceed."

"The boys are doing very well, with no neurological damage from the first two procedures," Goodrich said. "There is no need to rush."

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THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, January 15, 2004
1st Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: 1S 4:1-11
Gospel: Mk 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus and begged him, "If you so will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." The leprosy left the man at once and he was made clean. As Jesus sent the man away, he sternly warned him, "Don't tell anyone about this, but go and show yourself to the priest and for the cleansing bring the offering ordered by Moses; in this way you will make your declaration."

However, as soon as the man went out, he began spreading the news everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter any town. But even though he stayed in the rural areas, people came to him from everywhere.

Commentary

I've often heard people say, "I felt like a leper!" No need to look at their skin, though, or to count their fingers; what they are saying is that they felt isolated or completely discredited. In that sense the world is still full of lepers. There are lepers in every parish and there may even be a leper or two in one's own house. A young man said to me recently that he felt like a leper in his own family. People were steering around him, he said; no one ever asked him what he thought or how he felt. It is one thing to choose to be alone (see yesterday's reading), but to be cast into isolation is another. We are social beings by nature, and it requires great strength to be alone; nor is it always a good thing. What can you do for someone who feels isolated but to reach out and touch them? You are more than just you when you do that: you are society, you are community, you are the Church, you are the human race. One may even say you are Jesus. "Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him."

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

JUDICIAL ETHICS—Errors committed by a judge—A thorough evaluation of the letter-complaint reveals that the alleged errors committed by respondent Judge pertain to the exercise of his adjudicative functions. Such errors cannot be corrected through administrative proceedings, but should instead be assailed through judicial remedies. This has been well-emphasized in the case of Flores vs Abesamis (275 SCRA 302 [1997]) "xxx the established doctrine and policy is that disciplinary proceedings and criminal actions against Judges are not complementary or suppletory of, nor a substitute for, these judicial remedies, whether ordinary or extraordinary. Resort to and exhaustion of these judicial remedies, as well as the entry of judgment in the corresponding action or proceeding, are pre-requisites for the taking of other measures against the persons of the judges concerned, whether of civil, administrative, or criminal nature. It is only after the available judicial remedies have been exhausted and the appellate tribunals have spoken with finality, that the door to an inquiry into his criminal, civil, or administrative liability may be said to have opened, or closed." The records lay bare that complainant has utilized the available judicial remedy of certiorari, prohibition and mandamus before the RTC of Quezon City for the review of the questioned decision of respondent Judge and has further elevated the matter to the Court of Appeals. Therefore, a decision on the propriety of the decision of respondent Judge in this administrative proceeding would be premature. Complainant, in effect, abuses court processes by prematurely resorting to administrative disciplinary action even before the judicial remedies are settled [Resolution, Justice Austria-Martinez, Second Division, Bello III vs Diaz, A. M. MTJ-00-1311, October 3, 2003]

BY R. B. VERA

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR THE LTO-IT PROJECT

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & COMMUNICATIONS
LAND TRANSPORTATION OFFICE
East Avenue, Quezon City

LTO-IT PROJECT FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE FILIPINO PEOPLE

WE support the Land Transportation Office-Information Technology (LTO-IT) Project, which the government undertook to improve public service and promote transparency and good governance for the benefit of the Filipino people.

The LTO-IT Project is the Philippine's FIRST INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECT implemented nationwide at NO COST TO THE GOVERNMENT.

Undertaken through a Build-Own-Operate (BOO) scheme under the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Law, the government has no cash out for this project, which is being funded by Stradcom Corporation, a private sector proponent.

The LTO envisions a well-developed transportation system that will improve the quality of life of the Filipino people, particularly in providing a more viable means of land transport and a secured travel for transport users and commuters. It is our mission to rationalize the land transportation services and facilities and to implement effectively the various transportation laws, rules and regulations.

That is why we have implemented the LTO-IT Project, which was awarded to Stradcom after competitive public bidding.

With the computerization project in place nationwide, LTO transactions, such as issuance of driver's license and motor vehicle registration, are now processed online through the LTO-IT System. The project has also paved the way for the build-up of a computerized database capable of storing millions of records of licensed drivers and registered motor vehicles.

We believe that the government and private sector partnership between LTO and Stradcom should be commended for contributing to nation building.

-1-

LTO and Stradcom are fully committed to successfully complete and operate the LTO-IT Project towards efficient public service and good governance for the benefit of the Filipino people.

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LTO Transportation District Officers
Association of the Philippines, Inc. (TDOAP)

* Signed via facsimile

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Cabinet men seek campaign guidelines

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

MANY CABINET members were wondering if they could campaign legally for President Macapagal-Arroyo and have asked for guidelines during yesterday's Cabinet meeting.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman said the concern was raised by most of the Cabinet members, whom, she said were not politicians but "technically-oriented" and would be in this kind of situation for the first time.

"We don't want to be accused of electioneering," said Soliman, one of those included in the President's campaign team.

She denied she would be asked to organize urban poor groups into rallies for the President.

"We were advised that appointed officials at the Cabinet level can campaign for the President," she said, saying this was stated in the guidelines of the Commission on Elections.

But she said Cabinet members were told to "delineate" their political preferences from their job of serving all people regardless of political color, faith and ideology.

"We will still serve everyone," she said.

Housing Secretary Mike Defensor, campaign spokesperson for the President, meantime, predicted a "sustained 10 to 12 percent increase" in the President's popularity ratings from February to April or a month before the presidential elections on May 10.

Defensor noted that a recent survey showed that the President placed second, with 28 percent, to action king Fernando Poe Jr. who got 36 percent.

Defensor said the President's 28 percent rating came about because of a 5 percent gain he attributed to the positive response on the senatorial slate presented by the President on Jan. 5.

He said the President's ratings increased while those of her rivals decreased by five percent.

"We feel that in the coming weeks, we will be able to gain another 10 to 12 percent and in the coming month, February, we will have a sustained increase until April," he said.

He said the President's ratings would increase once her political machinery begins to roll and the people hear all candidates on the campaign trail.

Ermita sees no conflict as campaigner

By TJ Burgonio

DEFENSE Secretary Eduardo Ermita sees no conflict between his present Cabinet position and his new role as President Macapagal-Arroyo's chief campaign manager.

"I don't think there's any conflict. What's important is that I'm not compromising my job as defense secretary for purposes of politics," he told reporters.

Ermita, who was named campaign chief executive officer of Ms Macapagal who is seeking a fresh six-year term in the May elections, noted out that the Constitution does not bar a Cabinet secretary from "getting involved in politics."

Ermita, a three-term congressman in Batangas, stressed that his main job in the campaign would be merely "to assist in the organizational aspect," pointing out that presidential legislative adviser Gabriel Claudio would still be the overall operations officer.

"I'll just listen during the meetings of the campaign period and I'll teach them how to handle a particular problem on the ground," he said.

Ermita said he was tapped for the President's campaign because he chairs the administration party Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats in Region 4, where the hold of the ruling party on local politicians is not as strong as in the other regions.

"They thought I might be helpful because of my experience in the arbitration committee before the 2001 elections," he said. "They just want to get the benefit of experience since especially in Region 4, I know the problems."

Ermita also dismissed insinuations he might use the resources of the Department of Defense which he heads to further the presidential bid of Ms Macapagal or even campaign for her among the 113,000 officers and men of the Armed Forces.

Apart from Ermita and Claudio, also tapped for the President's campaign were Speaker Jose de Venecia, Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo, Marita Jimenez, presidential adviser on overseas development assistance, chief of staff Rigoberto Tiglao and Press Secretary Milton Alingod, among others.

Another toll hike seen

Abigail L. Ho

MOTORISTS using the North Luzon Expressway may have to pay a toll fee of as much as P200 for the whole stretch from Balintawak in Quezon City to Sta. Ines in Pampanga starting next year.

This amount is only for Class 1 or light vehicles like cars, jeepneys, pick-ups and vans. By government estimates, the rate could be more than double, even triple, for Class 2 (buses and light trucks) and Class 3 (heavy trucks and trailers) vehicles.

Toll Regulatory Board (TRB) executive director Jaime Dumlao Jr. said in an interview Tuesday that the estimates were based on 1995 costs. He said these would still be adjusted upon turnover to the new operator, Manila North Tollways Corp., by next year, possibly resulting in even higher toll rates in 2005.

Only last month, the TRB granted the petition of the current operator, Philippine National Construction Corp., for a 29-percent hike.

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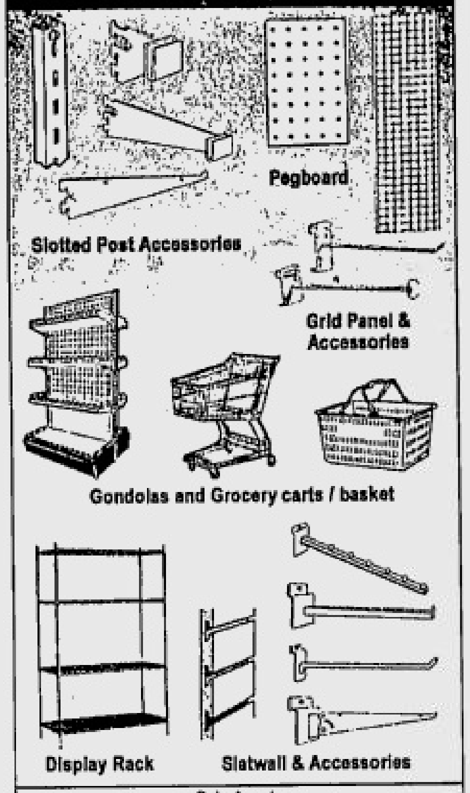

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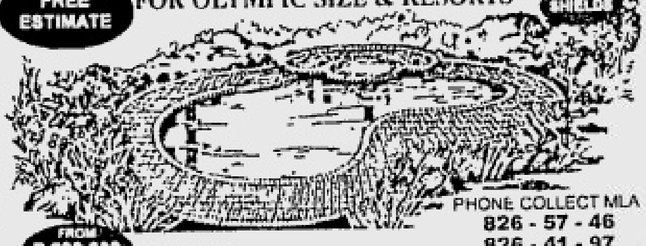

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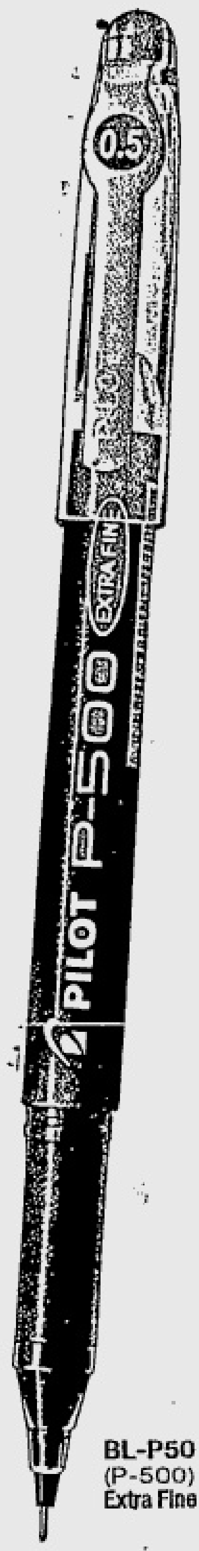

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High court stops Meralco rate hike

From page A1

the first brush Meralco has had with the high court. In 2002, the Supreme Court ordered the group to pay back P30 billion to customers for years of overcharging. Meralco, which is making the refunds in stages, also faces maturing debts of around P24.6 billion by 2006.

Reacting to the Supreme Court order, Meralco president Jesus Francisco said the company had asked its lawyers to study the details of the ruling.

Oral arguments on Jan. 27

"If the rate hike stays, then we will just prepare for oral arguments set for Jan. 27, but if not, we may have to file a motion for reconsideration," he said. "But whatever the case maybe, we have always followed orders from the Supreme Court."

Meralco shares had been rising in recent days due to the rate hike.

Acting ERC chair Leticia Ibay said in a telephone interview that the regulator had yet to receive a copy of the order. "Our lawyers are ready to study what the order says and to do what are necessary to comply with it," Ibay said.

Party-list groups

The Supreme Court issued the "status quo" order while it hears the petition of FDC president Ana Maria Nemenzo, Akbayan Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales, Partido Manggagawa Rep. Renato Magtubo, Sanlakas Rep. JV Bautista, and Ma. Theresa Diokno-Pascual.

They had asked the court to issue a temporary restraining order against the rate increase, to declare unconstitutional the portion of the Energy Power Industry Reform Act's (Epira) implementing rules which give the ERC the power to grant utilities provisional authority to increase their rates, and to nullify the provisional authority that ERC gave Meralco.

The high court resolved, "without giving due course to the petition," to require the ERC and Meralco to comment on the case within a "non-extendible" period of 10 days after they receive a copy of the SC order.

Petition

In their 14-page petition, FDC and the other petitioners said the tribunal had to immediately intervene in the case because the ERC has "failed to live up to its mandate to protect the public interest."

"It is clear that respondent ERC, mandated by law to protect the rights of the consuming public, cannot be counted upon to do so because it has thrown its lot with respondent Meralco. For this reason, only this court may provide the relief petitioners pray for," they said.

"Without this Court's intervention through the issuance of the preventive writs prayed for, petitioners and the consuming public at large will be gravely and irreparably injured in January 2004 because a new round of electricity rate hike will be foisted on them," the petitioners added.

Provisional orders

In asking the high court to declare unconstitutional Rule 3 section 4(e) of Epira's implementing rules, the petitioners said this constituted "undue delegation of legislative power" because Epira does not "authorize the issuance of provisional orders."

They said the section could fill in what the law did not provide.

The petitioners also asked the court to nullify the provisional authority the ERC gave Meralco last Nov. 27.

"FDC laments the propensity of ERC to grant provisional authorities in favor of utilities, to the detriment of consumers. These provisional authorities are often a fait accompli because the final decision is almost always the same as the provisional authority," FDC said in a statement.

Sham public hearing

"In the case of Meralco, it was given a provisional increase on its rates in 1994. The SC, however, has ordered Meralco to refund the provisional increase. Until now, Meralco has failed to refund the whole amount," the group said.

FDC also denounced as a "sham" the ERC public hearing held on Monday. "The ERC's patent refusal to allow relief for consumers during the public hearing is a manifest bias for Meralco," it said.

Meralco, whose key shareholders are the government and a joint venture of energy firm First Philippine Holdings and Spain's Union Fenosa SA, returned to profit in the second quarter of 2003 after losing P2 billion in 2002.

Astro del Castillo, managing director of financial management firm, First Grade Holdings Inc., said the court order was "a minor setback for Meralco," which would prompt investors to take profits in the stock market.

Del Castillo said there was still a strong chance Meralco would eventually get the rate hike reinstated because the increase had already been approved by the ERC.

Serious threat

However, if the Supreme Court rules definitively against the increase, then "it would be serious threat to Meralco."

"This will cause a huge correction in the market tomorrow," said Oliver Plana, research head of Asiasec Equities Inc.

The main Philippine stock index has risen 5.75 percent this year, powered by optimism about the earning prospects of telecommunications and energy companies.

Meralco's B shares, open to foreign investors, have surged 42 percent in the first seven trading days of 2004—even after a fall on Wednesday of 5.48 percent or P2 to P34.50.

Political hot potato

Its A shares, restricted to Filipinos, closed unchanged at P21.75 but have leapt 45 percent so far this year.

The rate increase has also become a political hot potato.

Critics accuse President Macapagal-Arroyo of allowing the increase in return for support from the powerful Lopez family, which owns part of Meralco, in convincing Noli de Castro to run as her vice president in the country's elections on May 10.

De Castro, a popular senator, used to be a newsreader at ABS CBN, a Lopez-controlled television network.

P30 billion in concessions

Last week, Meralco announced that it had concluded negotiations with independent power producer First Gas Power Corp., another Lopez-owned firm, which resulted in a package of concessions worth up to P30 billion.

In a press statement, Meralco's IPP review committee said an amended power purchase agreement was signed with First Gas, which include immediate savings for consumers of P10.6 billion or 1 centavo per kWh. It was not clear though when consumers will benefit from the deal.

Meralco buys electricity from First Gas aside from from the National Power Corp. and Quezon Power Philippines Ltd.—also an IPP.

First Gas owns the 1,200-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant in Sta. Rita, Batangas, while Quezon Power owns the 470-MW coal-fired plant in Mauban, Quezon.

Full benefits

Committee chair Margarito Teves said customers would begin to receive the full benefits of the amended deal once the ERC approved it.

The Meralco board of directors had formed the committee to oversee talks with the IPPs. The other member is independent director Emilio Vicens, Union Fenoza's managing director for Asia.

Teves said the negotiations with First Gas were finalized last Dec. 29 after a series of meetings over 17 months.

"First Gas grants many major concession that directly benefit consumers in this renegotiated agreement, which offers added savings under every scenario," the Meralco board director said.

Consumers savings

In August last year, Teves said negotiations with the IPPs could provide consumers savings of about P3.27 per kWh.

Teves, also chief executive of Landbank of the Philippines, had said that the total concessions expected to be included in the renegotiated deals with both First Gas and Quezon Power could be at least P44 billion over the duration of the contracts.

Meralco started buying part of its electricity supply from the IPPs since 2001 and 2002. The distributor's 25-year power sales contracts with Quezon Power and First Gas are good until 2026 and 2027, respectively. *With reports from Reuters and AFP*

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Power play

By PDI Research

May 30, 2003—The Energy Regulatory Commission approves Meralco's petition for rate increase of 8.76 centavos per kilowatt-hour. The increase will apply to customers with a monthly consumption of 300 kilowatt hours and more.

June 27, 2003—ERC Chair Manuel Sanchez is quoted as saying that there will be no immediate changes in electricity rates of Meralco for they still have to decide whether Meralco could pass on to its customers the P20-billion settlement payment to National Power Corp. The estimated increase, if passed to the customers, is about 13 to 14 centavos per kilowatt-hour.

Oct. 10, 2003—Meralco formally files a petition with ERC for a P13.58-centavo rate hike. The company claims that it is in critical financial condition caused by the refund to customers earlier ordered by the Supreme Court.

Nov. 27, 2003—ERC grants Meralco a rate increase of 12 centavos per kWh starting Jan. 1, 2004. The company is expected to gain P2 billion more next year and increases its profitability by 10.3 percent from an earlier projection of 7 percent.

Dec. 3, 2003—Malacañang denies that the order granting Meralco the rate increase is not part of a deal with Lopezes to draft Sen. Noli de Castro, a former newsreader of the Lopez-owned ABS-CBN media network, as President Macapagal-Arroyo's running mate.

Dec. 15, 2003—Consumer groups ask the ERC to reverse its decision authorizing Meralco to raise electricity rates by 12 centavos per kWh. The National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reforms claims that consumers should not shoulder the burden of financing the company debts and programs.

Dec. 22, 2003—ERC junks the petition of the nine consumer groups to revoke its order giving provisional authority to Meralco to raise power rates starting Jan. 1 without a public hearing.

Osmeña claims ₱2B greased SSS bank deal

From page A1

President Macapagal-Arroyo said on Tuesday that she won't interfere in the transaction.

Resign

Osmeña also demanded the resignation of De la Paz for being part of a "shallow cover-up" to sell the shares owned by SSS contributors at an outrageously low price.

"The members of the SSS should be demanding that she rescind the deal, account for her actions, pay for any loss and resign in disgrace," said Osmeña.

De la Paz, however, said that the SSS would earn a total of P14.7 billion in the next six and a half years from the deal.

"We expect to earn between P700 million and P1 billion from the downpayment of P1 billion," De la Paz said, adding that the P7-billion secured promissory note is expected to earn about P13 billion.

To diversify holdings

"This is the one opportunity that I have seen where we can diversify our holdings and earn some value for our money through interest earnings, which we have not been getting in the last four years in the form of dividends," she said.

De la Paz recalled that when the SSS Commission was discussing the deal, "I thought we should not even be with SSS if we were afraid to make the right decisions."

Sen. Edgardo Angara was quick to brand the deal as "plunder" of pension funds on a "grand scale, saying it was a "grossly anomalous and scandalous transaction."

Osmeña said the Senate committee on banks, which he chairs, will look into the sale of the SSS shares to Banco de Oro, a universal bank owned by business tycoon Henry Sy.

Suspicious timing

In justifying the need for a Senate inquiry, Osmeña cited the timing of the sale.

When asked by administration Sen. Robert Barbers if he considered the sale a "midnight deal," Osmeña replied: "Why do we have (to sell the shares) at the quietest time of the year? This is another badge of suspicion (on the administration)."

Angara also said the Macapagal administration was engaged in the midnight sale of "practically national treasures."

Upon a motion by Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan, and without objections from the chamber, Senate President Franklin Drilon immediately referred the matter to the Committee on Banks.

Higher acquisition cost

In his speech, Osmeña disclosed that the shares were sold to Banco de Oro at P43.50 per share for a total of P8.169 billion. But the SSS bought the shares three years ago at P76 per share, or for P14.272 billion, he said.

Osmeña said that the lopsided deal translated into a loss of P6.103 billion or 43 percent of the original acquisition cost.

P7.1-B balance

According to Osmeña, the terms of the sale were even more outrageous with Banco de Oro shelling out only P1 billion as downpayment with the balance payable in six and a half years.

"Mrs. Cora de la Paz boasts that this is a good deal to SSS members because the P43.50 price per share was at a 30 percent premium to Equitable PCI-Bank's P33.50 price traded in the stock exchange last December," said Osmeña.

He said that the SSS chief claimed that the deal was structured in such a way that the agency would not show any loss because the balance of P7.1 billion will be covered by the zero-coupon bond principal of P12.9 billion due in six and a half years, and that Banco de Oro did not include a "due diligence condition."

Half-truths

Osmeña said all these claims were "half-truths."

He also disclosed that after Edsa II, five groups approached SSS and offered to buy its shares in Equitable PCI-Bank at between P49 to P70 per share.

Osmeña identified the interested buyers as the Gokongwei Group with Taiwanese partners, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., Bank of the Philippine Islands with JP Morgan, Newbridge Capital and the Sycamore Group, both of the United States.

"That was three years ago. All offers were turned down. Today, despite the loss of opportunity, Ms De la Paz says P43.50 is a great deal for SSS," said Osmeña.

House probe

At the House, several legislators also called for a congressional investigation into the "hasty" and "bargain" sale of the 29 percent SSS stake in Equitable PCI-Bank.

Through House Resolution No. 1433, Reps. Jacinto Paras (Lakas, Negros Oriental), Rodolfo Plaza (NPC, Agusan del Sur), and Marcelino Libanan (NPC, Eastern Samar) asked the committee on banks and financial intermediaries to look into the sale.

"Since the money involved belongs to millions of Filipino people, then the negotiation has to be investigated and if possible, the deal stopped, in protection of and in the interest of millions of Filipinos who are members of the SSS," the three congressmen said. *With a report from Carlito Pablo*

Senators to work longer hours

By Christine O. Avendaño

THE SENATE said yesterday it will be extending its working hours to approve important measures like the proposed P864.8-billion national budget, a day after it decided to drop the debate on Charter change for lack of time.

Senate President Franklin Drilon said that starting next week until Feb. 6, the Senate would be holding morning and afternoon sessions five times a week.

Drilon said approval of the 2004 budget by Jan. 23 would top the Senate agenda.

He said the budget bill would be sponsored on the floor starting next Monday.

"We assure our people that we will have a 2004 budget before the end of this month or by Feb. 6 at the latest," Drilon said at a news conference.

New Majority Leader Francis Pangilinan said there were around 20 measures that the Senate intends to approve before Congress takes an early break on Feb. 6 to give way to the election campaign.

Pangilinan said a number of measures are pending before the bicameral conference committee for approval, such as the human rights compensation bill, the Clean Water Act, the Domestic Violence bill, the bill to strengthen the political party system, the increase in the prosecutor's pay, the Securitization Act and the Documentary Stamps Tax, among others.

Not on the Senate agenda is the resolution seeking to convene a constitutional convention to effect amendments to the 1987 Constitution.

Drilon and Pangilinan said the Con-con resolution would not be pursued anymore as Sen. Edgardo Angara, the chair of the constitutional amendments committee who sponsored the measure, declared on the floor that it would be best left for the new Congress to tackle.

Drilon said he had already informed Speaker Jose de Venecia of this development. It was De Venecia who had been urging Congress to rush a Con-con resolution that would provide for the simultaneous election of delegates next May.

Gov't plays down US probe of RP telecom companies

From page A1

Last week, telecom leader Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) and second-ranked Globe Telecom signed deals with America's AT&T Corp., raising the rate for inbound calls terminating in landlines to $0.12 from $0.09. The figure is below the FCC's benchmark of $0.19 per minute for such rates.

Globe and PLDT signed a similar deal last December with other US carriers such as MCI Worldcom International and Sprint Communications Corp., ending months of wrangling.

Like a cartel

AT&T and MCI had previously complained to the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that the Philippine firms had acted like a cartel by uniformly raising their termination rates early in 2003.

Before the agreements were signed last December, the outstanding issues before the FCC had been resolved, with US regulators saying back payments owed to Philippine players would be made.

RP-US route busy

The US-Philippine route is the fourth-largest international route based on outgoing US calls, with about 1.7 billion minutes in 2001, according to data from the FCC.

Philippine carriers were paid around $190 million that year.

Call traffic has always been busy between the Philippines and the United States, where more than two million Filipinos work.

Based on a copy of the subpoena obtained by Reuters, the head of Globe Telecom's carrier business, Gil Genio, was among those ordered to face the grand jury this month.

PLDT spokesperson Butch Jimenez said his firm was consulting with US legal advisers to decide its response.

GMA angry

The US action drew an angry response from President Macapagal-Arroyo, a staunch ally of President George W. Bush in his antiterror campaign.

"We ask for decency and dignity in the treatment of Filipinos in legitimate business or work in any foreign land," she said in a statement on Wednesday.

Analysts said the looming legal battle was unlikely to dampen the bright outlook for Philippine telecom companies, whose revenues are expected to be higher this year thanks to a flood of text messages and voice calls expected in the run-up to the May 10 national election.

PLDT and Globe helped propel the stock market to a two-year high last week. PLDT finished P15 lower at P920 on Wednesday as investors took profits after a recent rally.

Globe Telecom, which has risen 4.65 percent since the start of the year, ended P10 lower at P900.

Forecast

Reuters Research, a unit of Reuters Plc., forecast net income of P16.06 billion for PLDT this year, a 60-percent gain from expected 2003 earnings, or earnings per share of P95.22.

Globe Telecom's net income for 2004 is seen at P13.06 billion or P92.51 per share. Globe does not give earnings forecasts, but is expected to earn around a net P10 billion.

"With the agreements already signed, why should we worry," said Asiasec Equities research head Oliver Plana.

"This should be no cause for alarm given their strong mobile phone businesses."

Embarrassed

National Telecommunications Commission chief Armi Jane Borje said in a telephone interview that local telecom executives were embarrassed about being served subpoenas by the US justice department.

"They felt bad about it because they were supposed to be guests there. The subpoenas should have just been served here in the Philippines. That wasn't such a good way to treat a guest," she said.

"They could have been better treated. They may not attend conferences in the US anymore because of what happened. The idea will always be hanging over them that whenever there are disagreements (between them and American carriers), something like this can happen," Borje added.

To face court Jan. 15

The telecom executives, including Globe Telecom senior vice president Gil Genio and Digital Telecommunications Phil. Inc. carrier business group head Perla Ignacio, are scheduled to appear before a US District Court on Jan. 15.

The FBI served the subpoenas on representatives of Globe, Digitel, PLDT, Smart Communications Inc., Bayan Telecommunications Inc. and Eastern Telecommunications Phil. Inc. *Reports from Reuters and Abigail L. Ho*

Politicians told: Keep out of Iloilo festival

From page A1

free from politics.

Iloilo's premier festival is expected to draw about 1.2 million people. Its highlight is the competition of the Ati-Ati tribes, in which soot-blackened members dance to the thundering beat of drums, their way of interpreting the lore and way of life of the indigenous Ati of Panay.

Politicians will not be allowed to disrupt the parade of the Ati-ati tribes or display streamers proclaiming their candidacy along the 5-km route of the parade. If they arrive late, they will have to use the backstage as passageway. And any campaign streamers will be taken down and dumped as trash.

But then, President Macapagal-Arroyo will be opening either the "Kasadyahan" on Jan. 24 or the Ati-Atihan parade on Jan. 25. Except for her, no politicians will be allowed to speak onstage and they will be treated just like any other spectator and reveler.

Private foundation

Benito Jimena, executive director of the 2004 Iloilo Dinagyang committee, said the organizers wanted the event to be apolitical. "We are a private foundation and we don't want to be identified with any politician."

Jimena admitted that enforcing the rules on streamers and checking on the conduct of politicians would be hard, considering their penchant to seek out the crowd—and possible votes in the May elections.

The organizers said they would want to be sensitive to everyone attending the Dinagyang, mainly for religious and cultural reasons. Many of the people may not be comfortable with the raw display of politics, like politicians working up a crowd, they said.

Show biz people too

The same rules apply to show business personalities who have been invited by all sorts of companies, such as soft drinks, beer, liquor, snack food, shampoo, soap, sanitary napkin and feminine wash. They will not be allowed to throw candies or products of their sponsors to the crowd so as not to disrupt the parade.

Commercialism

The festival started as a religious rite in the San Jose Parish in Iloilo to honor the arrival in 1968 of a replica of the Santo Niño (Child Jesus) from Cebu. Through the years, it has grown into a huge festival that has been criticized for its crass commercialism.

In 1977, the festival's name, Iloilo Ati-atihan, was changed to Dinagyang to differentiate it from the Ati-atihan Festival in Kalibo, the capital town of neighboring Aklan.

Much-awaited

The Dinagyang is a much-awaited event for Iloilo's hotel and restaurant industry, which enjoys full occupancy during the festival. The rest of the year, the hotels have only a 60-percent occupany rate.

Initiated by the city government, the festival was taken over by the Iloilo Dinagyang Foundation in 2002. Mayor Jerry Trenas had wanted the private sector to take the lead in running the event.

One of the unique features of this year's festival is the celebration again of the Chinese New Year during the Dinagyang week on Jan. 19-25. Some 200,000 people are expected to watch the parade, dragon and lion dances, and the festivals of Chinese dances and food along Iznart Street, the city's Chinatown.

EU envoys oppose death penalty

From page A1

two weeks before the execution of convicted kidnappers Roberto Lara and Roderick Licayan.

The two are scheduled to die by lethal injection on Jan. 30.

As part of the campaign to persuade President Macapagal-Arroyo to stay the execution, the Coalition Against Death Penalty (CADP) said that priests, bishops and death row inmates were set to fast on Jan. 28.

Late last year, Ms Macapagal lifted the four-year moratorium on execution following a surge in kidnapping cases in the country and protests from the Chinese-Filipino community.

Rodolfo Diamante, executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines-Episcopal Commission on Prison Pastoral Care, said a noise barrage in all jails in the country, dubbed "Kalampagan for Life" was also set on Jan. 26 but church bells would start ringing on Jan. 21.

A motorcade and vigil will be held at the National Bilibid Prisons the night before the executions.

Lawyers, too

Also today, a group of government lawyers will ask the Supreme Court to stop the execution of Lara and Licayan.

"Because of supervening events that happened, we are asking the Supreme Court to suspend the execution," said Persida-Rueda Acosta, head of the Public Attorney's Office. "We believe that the SC has the power to control the enforcement of its ruling (affirming the convicts' death sentence).

There are 1,916 convicts on death row nationwide, 168 of whom have had their convictions confirmed by the Supreme Court and could be executed anytime. The President, however, wants those convicted of kidnap-for-ransom to go first.

Manila-based

All Manila-based ambassadors from the 15-member European Union-including Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, United Kingdom and Finland-as well as from incoming member, Czech Republic would be coming to the state penitentiary.

Envoys from Norway and Switzerland, which are both members of the Council Europe, also joining the visit.

The group of diplomats would be led by Jan De Kok, head of delegation of the Philippines of the European Commission, which is the EU executive body.

"We will go and see the death row people. This is in connection with President Macapagal-Arroyo's change of policy (regarding death penalty)," Finland's Ambassador Raimo Anttola told reporters.

Marcel van den Bogaard, third secretary for political and cultural affairs of the Dutch Embassy, said the ambassadors would again raise the EU's call for the abolition of the death penalty.

Inspection

Alicia Louro Pena, the EC delegation's third secretary, said the ambassadors would acquaint themselves with prison conditions, particularly in the maximum security compound where the death row inmates are confined. If allowed, they would talk with the death row inmates themselves.

The envoys also seek to meet Bureau of Correction Director Dionisio Santiago and top prison officials at 9 a.m. They will hold a press briefing at around 11 a.m. The ambassadors may also present their position regarding the death penalty.

Abolition

Capital punishment has been abolished in the European Union, which is spearheading its abolition worldwide.

The European Union is against the death penalty on the grounds of the inhumanity and finality of executions. Not only is it a violation of the right to life but its imposition as an act of state punishment denies human dignity, which is the core essence of a democracy.

Furthermore, the death penalty denies all possibilities for correction and rehabilitation of the offender, the European Union says. *With a report from Philip C. Tubeza*

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Comelec to fight Supreme Court decision

From page A1

cific consortium, legislators have called for the resignation of poll officials to ensure the credibility of the national elections.

"If we can't trust them with a contract, how can we trust them with our votes?" Sen. Joker Arroyo said.

But Abalos believes that the commission has not yet lost its credibility based on text messages that he received the other night.

"*Hindi sa nagbubuhat ako ng bangko* (I am not praising myself), I am what I am now because of hard work," he said at a briefing attended by four other Comelec officials.

Abalos promised to hold the national and local elections on May 10 as scheduled. But with almost no chance of winning an appeal before Election Day, the commission faces the prospect of tallying the ballots of 37.9 million registered voters in the traditional way—by hand.

This method is notoriously slow and has led to bloody violence and allegations of electoral fraud in the past.

Some legislators are pushing for an inquiry into the poll mess although the Supreme Court has asked the Office of the Ombudsman to prosecute the government officials behind the award of the contract to Mega Pacific.

Unless an impeachment complaint is filed against the top Comelec officials, they are beyond the reach of the Office of the Ombudsman.

Plunder

For now, officials of the Office of the Ombudsman said they could only go after middle-level Comelec officials, including those involved in the irregular bidding procedure, and the businessmen.

"It is highly probable that they could face plunder charges," Assistant Ombudsman Ernesto Nocos said. He noted that the more than P800 million in advance payment released by the Comelec to the Mega Pacific consortium exceeded the P50-million threshold for the filing of plunder charges.

But Nocos said there was nothing to stop the Office of the Ombudsman from initiating an investigation of the graft that attended the deal as ordered by the Supreme Court.

"We can start an investigation, but the filing of the criminal complaint can come only after an impeachment proceeding is concluded and the officials concerned are found guilty by the impeachment court," Nocos told the INQUIRER in a telephone interview.

He added, though, that the Office of the Ombudsman was authorized to "verify petition for impeachment."

Accountability

Sen. Manuel Villar said public and private officials behind the contract for automated polls, including those in the Comelec bid and awards committee, must be held accountable.

"The government must do so in order to send a strong signal to the public and the international business community that it does not tolerate graft and corruption," Villar said.

P100 million in commission

Abalos said he could not think of a way the money paid to the consortium for the automated counting of votes could be returned. "The possibility is always there but as to whether we could, I do not know."

Negros Occidental Rep. Apolinario Lozada said that whoever facilitated the awarding of the contract to the winning bidder may have received at least P100 million in commission, representing 10 percent of the project cost.

"Such presumption is not a remote possibility. The Supreme Court decision has made it clear that there were irregularities in that transaction," Lozada said.

But Abalos and Commissioner Ralph Lantion said the justices did not want any criminal charges filed against poll officials.

Lantion said only five justices led by Artemio Panganiban voted to void the contract and pursue criminal charges against Comelec officials, while four others concurred with the ruling penned by Panganiban without any pronouncement on criminal charges.

Lack of decision

Three justices said the contract was valid. If the dissenting opinions of Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. and Justice Jose Vitug are added to the three, the vote is 5-5 on voiding the contract and the filing of charges against the Comelec, according to Lantion.

"So, we assume that those who said we have no criminal liability are nine justices of the Supreme Court ... I hope everybody does that (look at the decision and the dissenting opinion) before they open their mouths and say something bad against us and against the commission," Lantion said.

Moreover, Davide said that there was no suggestion that graft and corruption accompanied the case or that the contract price was excessive or unreasonable, according to Abalos.

Motion for reconsideration

For these reasons, Abalos said the Comelec decided to file a motion for reconsideration. He said members of the commission reached this decision after they met the other night and early yesterday morning.

"That's why we are seeking reconsideration so that somehow, we could clean, clear not only our name but also the institution that we represent," the Comelec chair said.

Abalos said it was "not easy to gain a reputation, not easy to gain a name when overnight people are already calling you names ... without reading the decision."

"*Masakit yun ha, unless makapal lang talaga ang mukha mo, hindi ka matatablan niyan* (That hurts, unless you're shameless)," he said.

Above board

Abalos and four members of the commission insisted that the deal was aboveboard. "I am taking this as a challenge, if only to prove to the people my sincerest desire to redeem the name of the Comelec," he said.

New budget

At the briefing, Abalos told reporters that he met the other night with President Macapagal-Arroyo and some lawmakers who promised him that a new budget would be released to the Comelec for the expected shift to the manual mode of elections. *(Story on Page A1).*

"We were assured that we would be given the budget should we go back to manual for the purchase of the ballots," he said.

The ballots for the manual elections cost about P4 each and Comelec has to buy about 40 million pieces. It will also have to acquire tally boards and other pieces of equipment needed for the manual voting and counting. *(See story on Page A1.) With reports from Armand N. Nocum, Michael Lim Ubac and Cynthia D. Balana*

Gov't vows to hold polls on May 10

From page A1

on as scheduled," De Venecia said.

Saying that the future of democracy was at stake, Ms Macapagal made her position clear that the elections should be held on schedule.

De Venecia said Abalos had asked for a P300-million budget to finance the return to the manual elections, including the purchase of security paper for the ballots and election returns.

The Speaker said the amount could be taken from the P5.3-billion supplemental budget for the Comelec this year, which the House approved last month. But he said the Senate had yet to approve the budget.

Others at the meeting were Deputy Speaker Raul Gonzales, House Majority Leader Neptali Gonzales II, Liberal Party president Batanes Rep. Florencio Abad, Rep. Alfredo Maranon who heads the Nationalist People's Coalition contingent in the House, Zamboanga City Rep. Celso Lobregat representing the opposition Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, and Ms Macapagal's legislative adviser Gabriel Claudio.

Faith

"From our meeting and consultation last [Tuesday] night on what should be done, what I can say is that I have faith in the capability of Comelec as an institution to implement clean and credible elections under the law and jurisprudence," Ms Macapagal told reporters yesterday in Tanong, Malabon, where she inspected another water project.

She called on the people to keep faith in the electoral process, and on all political parties "to help the Comelec fulfill its very important role."

The President said the holding of the national elections as scheduled was critical to political and economic stability. She said there should be no doubt that the elections would be held.

"The future of our democracy is at stake, so we should help the Comelec perform its important and sensitive role," she stressed.

Explain SC ruling

Ms Macapagal said the Comelec would still file a motion for reconsideration of the high court's ruling. But she said one of the proposals during the meeting was for the Comelec to explain the outcome of the ruling to all political parties.

At a news conference in the Senate, Drilon said he had "emphasized" to Abalos that "what was critical was to restore the faith of our people in our electoral processes ... and in the Comelec."

He said Abalos intended to appeal the tribunal's ruling "in view of the concerns raised on the criminal liability."

But the filing of the motion for reconsideration would be done simultaneously with the preparations for manual elections, Drilon said.

Lead time

Quoting the Comelec, Drilon said the poll body would need "lead time" of 106-120 days to prepare for the manual counting of votes.

These include 60-90 days for the importation and production of dandy rolls, 10-20 days for the printing of the ballots, and another 10 days for their distribution, "so we can meet the May 10 polls," he said.

Drilon said that the government was "not entertaining any postponement of the elections," and that he would personally oppose such a move.

He said he had asked Abalos to invite all major political parties to ensure that they were informed about the measures being undertaken to ensure orderly elections.

Public hearing

Drilon also said Abalos had been summoned to a public hearing tomorrow by Sen. Edgardo Angara, chair of the congressional oversight committee on electoral reforms.

Angara said the hearing was meant to find out "what the Comelec plans to do in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling and what political parties expect the Comelec to do."

Selective automation

In a briefing at the Comelec, Abalos quoted Ms Macapagal as telling him that Malacañang had allowed the joint resolution calling for selective automation to lapse into law.

But the plan for selective automation will also be affected by the voiding of the contract for the automated counting machines, Abalos said.

"What machines are we going to use?" he said.

"The Supreme Court said that even the machines are defective and flawed ... I even told them that I was toying with the idea of borrowing the machines from Mega Pacific, if only to allow us to go on automation nationwide. But with this decision of the Supreme Court, even the machines are found to be defective despite the certification of the Department of Science and Technology."

Easier to do

In a phone interview later in the day, Abalos said the tribunal's ruling gave the Comelec no alternative but to implement manual elections.

He said that with the Comelec's experience in this type, it would be much easier to implement.

"The only problem is what kind of ballots we are going to use," he said.

Abalos said that to forestall problems, he planned to call representatives of all political parties to ask if it would be acceptable to them to use the paper for the automated ballots in the planned manual elections.

'Double efforts'

In Cebu City where he was attending the 99th birthday of his father, Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. said the voiding of the contract for automated elections would not jeopardize the May polls.

"They have the chance to prepare for the manual process [because they still have] lead time. They should double their efforts," he told TV reporters in reference to the Comelec.

Davide, along with Justice Jose Vitug, had voted to dismiss the petition to nullify the P1.3-billion contract.

"I voted with Justice Vitug to dismiss the petition because the court is not a trial of facts [and] we need some facts yet," Davide said. Besides, he added, "it's too close to the elections and the Comelec might run out of time."

Nevertheless, Davide said, the Comelec should be able to make the necessary adjustments in time for the elections.

"I hope the [Comelec] would be able to accomplish [everything needed] for the manual voting [so there would be] elections as scheduled," he said in Cebuano.

Danger to democracy

Presidential candidate Raul Roco called on the military to stay loyal to the Constitution. He also urged the public to be vigilant to make sure that the popular welfare would not be compromised by the national leadership.

He said the supposed loss of confidence in the ability of the Comelec to supervise the elections was causing a "crisis" that he described as "dangerous for democracy."

"We ask the lower majority members of the military to uphold the rule of law and defend constitutionalism. We think we face prejudice again in these times, and the Filipino people must again save the flag," Roco said in a press briefing at the Manila office of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, where he was the only candidate to attend the anti-death-penalty forum.

Vigilance

Fred Magbanua of the Task Force Pagbabago, a multisectoral group supporting presidential candidate Eddie Villanueva, also called for vigilance among the candidates and the political parties.

"It seems that prudence would call that [Comelec officials] should resign, but you know how it is in our country. They will remain there and fight it out. There's no choice but to be vigilant and field monitors all over the country," Magbanua said.

He said the Bangon Pilipinas, which is still seeking accreditation from the Comelec as Villanueva's political party, would deploy around 20 watchers for every precinct.

Protective mantle

He urged the people to "force" Malacañang to "exercise correct leadership and not give protective mantle to those who have lost their credibility ... by their own fault." ***With reports from Martin P. Marfil and Blanche S. Rivera in Manila; Jolene R. Bulambot, PDI Visayas Bureau***

Abalos says raps . . .

From page A1

your source very well and see who the person is being maligned," the Comelec chief said.

An earlier report quoting a source said that it was this "Korean-supplier friend" who helped Abalos package the deal while another source pointed to Eduardo Mejos, chair of the Comelec bid and awards committee, as the other person who should know details about the deal.

In a written statement which he issued yesterday afternoon, Abalos said he was "extremely appalled by the baseless, unfair and malicious allegations hurled against him."

"The story has marred my integrity which I had built over many years and has further undermined the reputation of the Commission on Elections at the most critical period," he said.

No access to gov't projects

Abalos pointed out that the story was baseless because the Comelec did conduct a bidding and, so, he could not have packaged the deal all by himself.

"The article mentions a 'Korean supplier-friend' from my days at the MMDA. How can an MMDA chair have access to a landmark government project which is under the supervision of an entirely different agency altogether?" he asked.

Abalos said that the story was "unfair" because the allegations came from an unnamed source, "an anonymous enemy," adding that if the writer had believed the veracity of the source's claims, he should have at least identified the source.

Outraged

Abalos also complained that the INQUIRER did not try to get his side, in violation of a basic tenet of journalism.

"I am outraged that a newspaper of such scope and reputation like the INQUIRER has allowed the publication of said story, written under the pretense of an investigative report, alongside articles on the Supreme Court's adverse ruling on the commission's contract for computerized vote counting and canvassing," he said.

"There is so much to do in order to ensure that the May elections proceed as planned and as envisioned. Let us focus on this task and not allow ourselves to be further derailed by such reports," he said.

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2 lawmakers warn against 'No-El' plot

From page A1

ident and her campaign team know that she won't win."

Both Rosales and Bautista said only the Comelec should be blamed for plunging the country into confusion with its automation contract with the Mega Pacific consortium.

Unabashed fraud

Rosales said "the specter of scandalously extensive, unabashed fraud is now luminously shadowing" the May elections.

Quoting military insiders, she warned that "armed putschist groups are waiting in the wings in the event that disaster visits" the polls.

Akbayan party-list nominee Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel noted the "threat" that in a No-El scenario, "certain forces may take advantage of the situation to either perpetuate themselves in power or employ extra-constitutional means to grab power."

She said that while the elections should push through, the Comelec's inability to carry out its duty had "put that assumption in doubt."

But Akbayan Rep. Mario Aguja said the public would "not buy any attempt to delay or set back" the elections.

It will mean that "we will be stuck with a President like Ms Macapagal, who has proved to be unacceptable as a leader," he said.

Under suspicion

But Director General Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., chief of the Philippine National Police, told reporters that he had not monitored any recruitment of PNP officers for a possible destabilization plot.

He said "all groups are under suspicion" as a matter of protocol.

"If there are groups cooking up a plot, they are definitely not capable of doing it. Everything emanates from issues and there is no legitimate issue for such action," he said.

Ebdane assured the public that the Armed Forces and the PNP were "on high moral ground, and we will not accede to any instigation."

He said both the police and the military proved true to their mandate when no official yielded to any "instigation" at the height of the impeachment case against Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. last year. But he refused to say whether he or any other top PNP officials were invited to desert the administration then.

At that time, two police generals told the INQUIRER that the protest actions by groups identified with deposed President Joseph Estrada and Sen. Gregorio Honasan were "testing the waters" for a possible government takeover.

Still, PNP field commanders are jacking up security in 494 areas nationwide where election-related violence was heavily recorded in 2001, Ebdane said.

Being particularly watched is Maguindanao, where unidentified men recently bombed a gymnasium, killing 15 people and injuring 87 others including Parang Mayor Vivencio Bataga.

Cagayan Valley, Abra, and the Lanao area are also on top of the PNP's priority list. Ebdane said the PNP would request the Comelec to deploy soldiers to assist police in keeping order in these areas.

Contingency plans

Batanes Rep. Florencio Abad urged the Comelec to call all political parties and watchdog groups to a meeting and present to them solutions or contingency plans on the holding of elections.

Abad, who chairs the Liberal Party, said in a phone interview that the "only option left" was to go back to manual counting although this would cost more and take more time.

In his party's case, he said, it would have to hire and deploy more watchers and canvassers.

He also said the Comelec had to be "very careful" in the manual counting because the people were now "predisposed" to thinking of poll irregularities after the Mega Pacific contract was found flawed.

Abad said he would agree to an "acceptable delay" so that the Comelec could prepare measures for orderly polls.

He said the elections should not be held beyond June 30, the mandated expiration of the terms of the president, vice president, legislators and local officials.

"There would be uncertainty [beyond that]," he said. "We cannot be holdovers, and vacuums are dangerous."

Human factor

Lita Menecio, a teacher at the Baguio City National High School, said many teachers had been led to think that automated counting machines would reduce their election workload.

Menecio, a member of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, said the automation being proposed by the Comelec would not replace the "human factor" necessary for organizing and processing voters and transporting ballots.

Remedios Taguba, education director in the Cordillera, said some teachers were disappointed by the voiding of the automated polls contract.

Allowances small

"Most teachers earn no more than P10,000 a month, and the allowances are too small for the extra work," she said.

Menecio said the Comelec should raise their poll allowances in order to match "the credibility offered by teachers to the election process."

In La Union, provincial Comelec director Marino Salas expressed dismay at the voiding of the contract: "I am so disappointed. All our preparations under Chairman [Benjamin] Abalos have been focused on automation. Now we will go back to the primitive way. Do we have enough time to prepare for this sudden turnaround?" ***With reports from Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk, and Vincent Cabreza and Gia Damaso-Dumo, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau***

The WORLD

Editor Luverne B. Gueco

WHO: Bird flu may be deadlier than SARS

HANOI—The bird flu that has raced through chicken farms in Asia and killed at least three people in Vietnam could become a bigger problem for the region than SARS, the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

If the virus develops the ability to spread through human contact, it could become a big health crisis, WHO regional coordinator Peter Cordingley said Wednesday in Manila.

It's "a bigger potential problem than SARS because we don't have any defenses against the disease," Cordingley said. "If it latches on to a human influenza virus, then it could cause serious international damage.

World Health Organization specialists were trying to determine Wednesday if the deaths of six children were linked to a mysterious bird flu, a day after confirming that the illness killed three people in Hanoi.

Several other deaths believed linked to avian flu can no longer be checked because they occurred too long ago, WHO epidemiologist Peter Horby said.

More than a million sick chickens in Vietnam have influenza A, or the H5N1 strain, and farmers have been ordered to destroy all infected birds. Health officials believe the disease is being transmitted from sick birds to people, with no further transmission due to human contact.

Since October, a total of 14 people—13 of them children—have come down with respiratory illnesses believed linked to the bird flu, which is also striking other parts of Asia. Twelve of the victims have died, including the three confirmed as having the virus.

Horby said preliminary tests of the six other children had come back negative, but that samples of the virus are being cultured.

The disease's flu-like symptoms in people include fever and coughing. On Wednesday, a doctor at a children's hospital in Hanoi said another suspected case had been admitted. No other details were released.

The H5N1 virus has ravaged chicken farms throughout Vietnam's southern Mekong Delta. A northern province just outside Hanoi has also been hit hard. All of the 12 people who died were in the capital, Hanoi.

Two patients remained hospitalized, with one improving while the other remained on a respirator, Horby said. He did not mention the newest suspected case admitted Monday night.

Horby said those involved in culling sick chickens had been advised to wear protective gear such as masks, gowns, gloves and goggles.

Meanwhile, as concern spread through the communist country a week before the Tet Lunar New Year—Vietnam's biggest holiday—authorities said they weren't sure what other types of livestock might be affected.

"We cannot rule out the possibility that the virus in poultry could infect people through another mammal such as pigs," said Dau Ngoc Hao, deputy director of the veterinary department in Hanoi.

But Horby expressed optimism, saying there's no history of bird flu becoming contagious among people. He said two outbreaks in Hong Kong—including one in 1997 that killed six people—only spread from chickens to humans. *AP*

Woman blows self up, kills four Israelis

EREZ CROSSING, Gaza Strip—A female Palestinian suicide bomber blew herself up Wednesday at the major crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip, killing at least four Israelis and wounding seven other people, Israeli rescue services and media said.

The bomber—who witnesses and Israeli media said was a woman—blew up in the area where thousands of Palestinian laborers and foreigners pass between Israel and the coastal strip, Israeli officials said.

Hamas and the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, linked to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, issued a joint claim of responsibility.

They identified the bomber as Reem Raiyshi, 21, a Gaza woman described as a Hamas militant. She appeared to be the first female suicide bomber from the militant Islamic fundamentalist group.

Soldiers often target Palestinian men as potential attackers. Hamas' use of a woman bomber could signal its willingness to compromise its religious principles in order to more easily carry out attacks.

Hamas spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin said the use of a woman was unique, but holy war "is an obligation of all Muslims, men and women."

"This is an indication that resistance will continue," he said.

The explosion occurred shortly before 10 a.m. The dead appeared to be all Israeli, media reported. The army said four of the wounded were Palestinian.

The bomber, who had a metal plate in her leg, was ushered into a special security office where soldiers search people who have medical implants that foil metal detectors, said Col. Pinchas Zuaretz, commander of Israeli forces in the southern Gaza Strip. *AP*

NGUYEN Cao Ky embraces a former bodyguard who had come to welcome him at a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City. AP

Ex-Viet leader returns home after 30 years

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam—Former South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky on Wednesday returned to the communist country that he fled nearly three decades ago, in his first homecoming trip since the Vietnam War ended.

Ky, 73, of Hacienda Heights, California, arrived in Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat Airport with his wife, daughter and three friends, becoming one of the best-known political figures from the former US-backed South Vietnamese government to return.

"A lot of people said 'Don't go, don't go,' but I said this is my home, my country," Ky said as he was driven in a van from the airport. "We Asians, we believe in destiny, so it's the right time, the right moment to come."

Arriving at his hotel, Ky reached out to give a warm hug to his former bodyguard who had come to greet him, along with a small crowd of friends, some bearing flowers.

Vietnam, which issued a tourist visa to Ky, has said it welcomes his decision "to come back to the homeland ... after many years apart."

Prior to his return, which coincides with Tet Lunar New Year festivities, Ky, a long-standing critic of the communist leadership in Hanoi, had said in interviews that he wanted to bring a message of reconciliation on his trip.

"The war ended 30 years ago, but it still divides us into two camps. So I want to put aside the past hatred, and just sit together and talk to one another, face to face," he told Radio Free Asia. "And I believe if everybody loves the country and loves its people, we will sit together as one."

He is expected to visit friends and family in Ho Chi Minh City before flying to Hanoi on Jan. 28 for a visit to his hometown of Son Tay, about 40 km northwest of the capital.

Ky, one of the most colorful leaders during the Vietnam War, was a flamboyant fighter pilot who became premier following a military coup in 1965. US officials were wary of his reputation as a playboy with a fondness for drinking, gambling and womanizing. *AP*

Saddam aide's nephews held by US troops

SAMARRA, Iraq—US forces moved a step closer in their hunt for the most wanted man in Saddam Hussein's former regime, detaining his four nephews in a pre-dawn raid in this central city on Wednesday.

Hours later, a car bomb exploded in front of a police station in the central Iraqi city of Baqouba, causing an undetermined number of casualties, police said.

Two of the nephews arrested Wednesday are suspected of helping to hide their uncle, former Iraqi Vice President Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri and a right-hand man of Saddam Hussein.

Al-Douri has a US$10-million bounty on his head and is suspected to have been orchestrating insurgent attacks on US-led coalition forces.

"One of these days his head will rise up above the water, and we will be able to capture him as well," Lt. Col. David J. Poirier of Chicago told an Associated Press reporter who observed the raid.

Samarra and Baqouba are part of the so-called "Sunni triangle," home to diehard Saddam loyalists. Also in the triangle is Habbaniyah where a US Army Apache attack helicopter was brought down by apparent enemy fire on Tuesday. It was the third aircraft lost this month. Both crew members were unhurt.

Forty soldiers from 720th Military Police Battalion out of Fort Hood, Texas, raided the two houses in a darkly lit neighborhood of Samarra after a tip. The troops poured out of heavily armored Humvees supported by Abrams tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles.

They climbed over a 2-meter-high fence into the garden of a house before entering the structure and capturing one of the targeted nephews and his two brothers. The second nephew was seized at a nearby home. *AP*

WORLDBRIEFS

Pakistan becomes a problem for US

WASHINGTON—The Bush administration's success in persuading Libya to reveal its weapons of mass destruction programs has created a new and potentially embarrassing problem: Pakistan—a vital US ally in the war on terror—appears to have been a main supplier of nuclear know-how to Libya, and possibly to North Korea and Iran. Libya pledged to name its suppliers when it announced last month it was giving up its nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs. Officials say many of the names probably will be Pakistani. They say evidence points to Pakistani nuclear experts as the source of at least some technology Libya used in its nuclear weapons program. Similar reports have arisen about probable Pakistani assistance to Iran and North Korea, countries President George W. Bush said comprised an "axis of evil" with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. *AP*

UN official, 36 others die in crash

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan—An Uzbek jet that crashed tried to land once in heavy fog before trying again and touching down short of the runway, killing all 37 people on board, including the head UN official in the Central Asian country, the prosecutor general said Wednesday. The passengers on the Uzbekistan Airways flight that crashed Tuesday evening—32 men, four women and a child—included four foreigners, Rashid Kadyrov said. Among the dead were Richard Conroy, 56, a British-Australian citizen who headed the UN mission to Uzbekistan; Richard Penner, 57, representative of the US-based World Concern humanitarian organization; and two Afghan businessmen. Kadyrov said no evidence so far indicated terrorism was involved. *AP*

Geek image shattered by new study

LONDON—The typical Internet user—far from being a geek—shuns television and actively socializes with friends, a study on surfing habits said on Wednesday. The findings of the first World Internet Project report present an image of the average Netizen that contrasts with the stereotype of the loner "geek" who spends hours of his free time on the Internet and rarely engages with the real world. Instead, the typical Internet user is an avid reader of books and spends more time engaged in social activities than the non-user, it says. And, television viewing is down among some Internet users by as much as five hours per week compared with Net abstainers, the study added. *Reuters*

Monkeys invade Indian Embassy

KATMANDU, Nepal—Monkeys have invaded the Indian Embassy in Nepal's capital, forcing diplomats to seek help from animal specialists, the embassy said Wednesday. About three dozen monkeys have attacked embassy officials, defecated in offices, and destroyed equipment, embassy spokesperson Sanjay Verma said. "We have sought help from experts and hope to get rid of the problem soon," Verma said. *AP*

Plans sprout for honeymoon on the Moon

WASHINGTON—Visionaries, dreamers and businessmen have dusted off their plans for honeymoons on the Moon, lunar villages and expeditions in weightlessness since US President George W. Bush put the idea back on the agenda.

The Moon boosters of the Space Frontier Foundation, which organizes a yearly "Return to the Moon" conference, said: "It is not possible to say with certainty what the first lunar settlement will look like. It is based on our best knowledge of what is technologically possible within the 25-year time frame we have stipulated."

Otherwise, dozens of lunar investors in businesses that for now exist only in cyberspace have posted the first plans for a house or a town on the Moon and are already dickering over the price of lunar property.

Hilton had the idea of a lunar hotel at the end of the 1990s. The hotel chain has already put hundreds of thousands of dollars into feasibility studies. In 1967, then-Hilton CEO Barron Hilton dreamed of tourists vacationing at the Hilton on the Moon, where they would enjoy reconstituted steak and fresh cocktails.

The Lunar Reclamation Society has plans for a lunar house that would be too expensive if all the materials were carted from Earth; better to take machinery that turns lunar dust into iron, aluminum, glass, concrete and ceramic.

Once built, the homes would be covered with lunar dust to protect them and their occupants from the extreme temperatures of lunar days and nights.

So that the lunar residents do not feel like moles, the houses would be equipped with windows that open into tunnels furnished with mirrors that would act as periscopes to safely give a view of the outside, the group imagines.

"Within the next two decades, you will be able to take a two-week trip to the Moon at a price you would expect to pay for the luxury-class European capital tour," said the Artemis Project, which promotes private enterprise on the Moon.

"You and your spouse fly to the launch site at Groote Eylandt, Australia, where you board the shiny new Single Stage To Orbit (SSTO) rocket, the Melva Gay.

"There are fifty passengers aboard, with a crew of five to take care of them. The SSTO flies to orbit, where within two hours she makes rendezvous with the fuel depot. *AFP*

Gadget touted to make dreams to order

TOKYO—The Japanese company that came up with the hit "BowLingual" device that translates dogs' barks into human words has now come up with a dream product—literally.

Takara Co. Ltd. says its Yumemi Kobo, or "dream workshop," gadget gives stressed out people a chance to go on a holiday or find their ideal partner—at least in their dreams.

Before nodding off, the would-be dreamer is supposed to look at a photo of what he or she wants to dream about and then record the story line on the $140 machine.

Using the voice recording as well as lights, music and aromas, the machine stimulates sleepers during periods of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and helps them direct their own dreams, the company says.

After eight hours, it wakes them up gradually with music and lights that simulate sunlight, avoiding any shock that could destroy fragile memories.

The manufacturers caution, though, that not all users of the gadget achieve exactly the dreams they hope for.

"We are still experimenting, mainly with company employees," Kenji Hattori, a Takara marketing executive, told reporters on Wednesday. *Reuters*

JAPAN'S toy giant Takara employee Emi Inoue displays the electronics gadget, placed on the bed side, on how to have good dreams "Yumemi-kobo (Dream factory)" with programmable music, lighting and fragrance at a press preview in Tokyo, Jan. 14. AFP

Email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph website: http://www.inq7.net

ISSN 0116-2642 INQUIRER Vol. 19 No. 38

THE PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER, INC. has its business and editorial offices at
•Chino Roces Ave corner Yague and Mascardo Sts., Makati City
•P.O. Box 2353 Makati Central Post Office 1263 Makati City
•Our telephone numbers are 897-8808 connecting all departments
•Editorial Fax 897-4793 / 897-4794 •Advertising 897-4807
•Circulation 527-3342 / 527-3348 / 528-0183 / 528-0186 and 528-0213 / Fax: 528-02-34.

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The story...

EDITORIALS

IT'S the story of our lives: an agency sworn to oversee the lawful conduct of elections found to be involved in unlawful conduct. It tells us—as though it has not been said so many times before—that we have not moved from where we are trapped, that we continue to wallow in the same swamp of corruption and ineptitude. It brings us ever closer to despair, if we are not in fact already there.

Benjamin Abalos declares that he will not resign his post as chair of the Commission on Elections despite the ruling of the Supreme Court voiding the contract with the Mega Pacific consortium for automated polls and despite the calls from certain quarters for him to do so. It's the story of our lives: government officials clinging mightily to their posts no matter that, in the face of disgrace, the only logical action for them is to let go. (In Japan, *seppuku* is the only way out for men of honor, but then again, Abalos and company do not seem to know the spelling of the word.) It illustrates the quality of the men and women who hold critical posts in this shaky ship of state, the navigators, as it were, without whose sense of principle, skillful parrying and steely nerve the same ship would be dashed on the shoals of doom.

This is the caliber of the man named by President Macapagal-Arroyo in 2002 to the top post of the Comelec—an apparent sop to his having been bypassed by the Commission on Appointments when he was chair of the Metro Manila Development Authority. Even then the attentive observer could only view the appointment as whimsical, if it did not smack of the tired feudal scenario of the power-wielder rewarding a vassal, chafing for the lack of a bone to chew on, a prized horse.

And what a horse it is, saddled with potential boons such as contracts, including the one involving automatic counting machines worth P1.3 billion and, in the words of the Supreme Court, wide open to "election fraud on a massive scale by means of just a few key strokes."

Imagine this. As the situation stands, according to Commissioner Resurreccion Borra, the final software to be used in the May elections is "still being developed and has not yet been finalized"!

It's the story of our lives: elections marked by violence, the murder and mayhem being the mere flesh-and-bone aspects of a ritual immeasurably damaged by the constant trauma of fraud. Those plagued by a short memory may be stirred to remember the likes of Miriam Defensor-Santiago or Aquilino Pimentel Jr., by their own earlier individual claims, grievously wounded by electoral cheating. (Nevertheless, they are once more in the running. Is it faith in the cosmic order that moves them, or is it a matter of getting wise to the system? Perhaps they're not telling.)

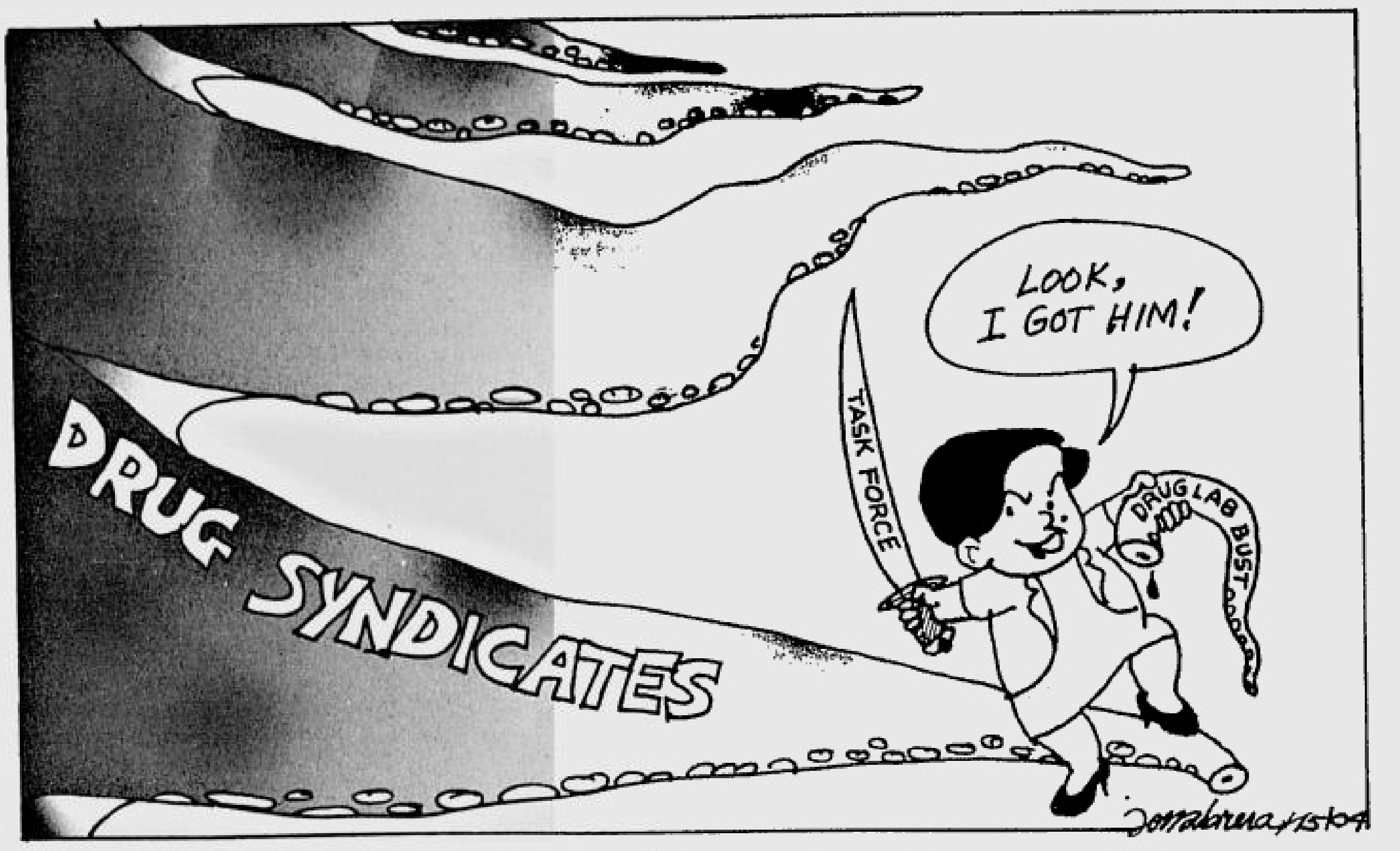
...Of our lives

AGAIN we are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea (a situation so often recurring that it has become the story of our lives): automated or manual counting for the political showdown in May?

But automated polls, like the modernization of the Armed Forces, is now an issue so fraught with controversy that it has become a minefield (no thanks to the likes of Commissioner Luzviminda Tancangco, the very one whose proposed impeachment not too long ago sputtered and died in the House where young Turks mouthing idealism strut about). Because we have been reduced to reckoning by degrees, better to cast aside that peril and simplify the choice to this: manual counting or—that specter looming as though on cue—no elections in May?

It's fairly obvious that if manual counting it is, then manual counting it has to be. What does it matter if in the civilized world, machines have long done the math to come up with the leaders whom the electorate has chosen? (But the Bush-Gore experience and the "hanging chads" are arguably another matter.) More damage will be inflicted on the body politic if the scheduled elections will be postponed beyond what the Constitution prescribes, and the chances of stability in that scenario are hardly reassuring.

But this is not to say that, after the shouting, the issue of the Mega Pacific contract should be left to molder. We're saying that those responsible—including those standing to benefit in any way from it—should be smoked out and made to pay. We're saying that it behooves Malacañang to tear its attention away from the campaign and push the punishment. Unless we are just howling at the moon.



Stop execution of two death convicts

As I See It

Neal H. Cruz

TO BE safe, President Macapagal-Arroyo should stop the execution of Roberto Lara and Roderick Licayan who are scheduled to die by lethal injection on Jan. 30. Two of their co-accused, Pedro Mabansag and Noel de los Reyes, have cleared Lara of involvement in the kidnapping of businessman Joseph Tomas Co and his assistant, Linda Manaysay, in Marikina. True, they have been tried and convicted by the Marikina regional trial court and the death penalty has been affirmed by the Supreme Court, but courts of law are not infallible. There have been cases in the past when the courts erred and innocent defendants were almost executed. One of these cases, I will recount later.

It may also be true that the allegations of Mabansag and De los Reyes clearing Lara are merely intended to save him, but we are not sure of that. They could also be telling the truth. The only way we can be sure is to reopen the case so that the new testimony and evidence can be subjected to scrutiny. But that will take time, and so the need for a stay of execution.

If after the new trial, they are still convicted, then a new date of execution can be set. But if there is doubt as to their guilt, then they should be set free immediately.

President Macapagal, desperately fighting a reelection battle, is trying to make an example of Lara and Licayan because of the increasing incidence of kidnapping, and also to show to the voters that she is a strong leader determined to wipe out criminality. But what if they are innocent but are put to death just to prove her point and win votes? That would be a horrible mistake. If they were merely meted out prison sentences, they can be set free if they are later found to be innocent. But if they are put to death, they cannot be restored to life even if proven innocent. Death is permanent. Nothing will be wasted if the execution date is postponed until it is determined without doubt whether they are guilty or not. But haste may result in the killing of innocent persons.

* * *

Years ago, two young men were almost executed in the National Penitentiary. They were found innocent later and released. The mastermind of the double murder, a Huk commander, confessed and cleared them of involvement. It took a young reporter to save them on the day of execution itself.

I have written about this case several times in the past, and the story was picked up by the news sections of the newspapers later, but I will recount the story for the benefit of the President and others who didn't see the earlier columns and stories.

The two young men (I won't give their names anymore) had been charged with killing a farmer and his wife one night in a remote barrio. Two witnesses who identified them and claimed seeing the murders were presented. The court of first instance sentenced them to death and the verdict was affirmed by the Supreme Court. The date of execution was set.

The reporter, Ramon J. Lopez, now living in the United States, was assigned by the old Manila Chronicle to cover the execution. While the condemned men were eating their last meal, Lopez heard one of them tell the other that he was celebrating his 16th birthday party on the night of the murders. Lopez remembered a recent Supreme Court ruling that convicts who were minors at the time the crime was committed could not be executed.

Lopez told the director of prisons about it. The director called the justice secretary who, in turn, called President Carlos P. Garcia. A few minutes before the first of the two death convicts were to be strapped to the electric chair, the hot line from Malacañang rang. President Garcia had ordered a stay of execution.

Later, a Huk commander who had been captured, confessed that it was his group that killed the couple and that the two death convicts had nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, it still took more than two years before the two were released while the government reopened the case.

The two went back to their hometowns already old men. They recounted having nightmares about the day they were almost executed. The government never paid them anything for the many years they suffered in death row nor for the potential income they lost while in prison. One of them is dead now. The other, as of last report a few years ago, was still alive.

The two witnesses whose false testimony had condemned them are also dead. One of them was killed in an accident (hit by lightning if I remember correctly) even before the convicts were released. Talk of divine justice.

The two accused and the two witnesses all lived in the same municipality. The two convicts were so angry with the witnesses that they said they plotted revenge when released. But when they learned that one of them died in an accident, their anger waned. God was already punishing them.

* * *

TODAY'S JOKE: Do you know why bra makers measure cup size by A, B, C, D, E, F? Here's what they mean?

A-ala talaga; B-barely there; C-comfortable; D-damn good; E-extremely large; F-fake.

* * *

NOTICE: The third grand reunion of Semper Association Inc. will be held on Saturday, Jan. 17, starting at 5:30 p.m. at Petron's Cultural Hall, 34th floor, Petron Megaplaza, Makati. The association is composed of retirees and former employees of Stanvac, Esso Standard Eastern, Visayan Exploration Co., Bataan Refining Corp., and Petron Corp.

Filipino

There's the Rub

Conrado de Quiros

GLORIA Macapagal-Arroyo says she will help Fernando Poe Jr. settle the question of his citizenship if he gets to have problems there. A lawyer filed a petition with the Comelec seeking to bar FPJ from running on the grounds that he is not a Filipino. His father had Spanish parents while his mother was an American. But the damsel comes to the aid of the lad in distress. "If he needs any official documents to fight his case," GMA vows, "the government is prepared to help him. I believe that Fernando Poe Jr. is a Filipino. I have no reason to doubt his being Filipino in heart and spirit."

Well, GMA may express the staunchest support for his staunchest rival all she wants, but not too many people are going to believe she did not have a hand in questioning his citizenship. She has motive, she has means, she has opportunity—the elements for being deemed suspect in a crime. In any case, I don't know how much weight her word carries right now. She did say in the solemnest terms she wouldn't run, and did. I don't know that FPJ will take comfort in the knowledge the President herself has vowed to help him. He has had many movies where the *contra bida* passed himself, or herself, off as a friend.

But quite apart from that, the whole business about FPJ's citizenship has its interesting aspects. Truly, it would be the most monumental irony if FPJ were to be barred from running for not being a Filipino. No one, not even Erap, has contributed more formidably to molding, rightly or wrongly, the Filipino's concept of himself, or his ideal self, than FPJ. Enough for San Miguel Beer, which has striven to project itself as the brew that has accompanied the Filipino on the path to self-discovery, to feature him prominently in one of its ads. If I recall right, it was right before the Centennial of Philippine Independence in 1998, and the setting of the ad was the days of the Katipunan. It depicted FPJ as a pillar of the Revolution, a messianic figure bathed in heroic light.

The heroes FPJ has played in his movies—or hero, the characters being pretty much interchangeable, or variations on a theme—have defined the Filipino concept of the ideal man for several decades. He is the quiet type who minds his own business, is loyal to his family and friends (Dencio Padilla was the quintessential friend), he remains unmarried in his movies, but is a tiger when provoked by nasty creatures. He is a simple man, more often than not from a poor family living in the slums, who gets to fight off a wealthy and powerful but crooked mayor and his goons and turn back their evil designs on a community or a member of it. To this day, that is how the average Filipino thinks of himself, or idealizes himself.

The activists of the 1960s and 1970s, of course, used to refer to the values his characters propagated as "feudal," with their strong religious overtones (the hero bows only to God), filial piety, *pakikisama*, fighting prowess as key to survival and escape, the blurring of class lines (the poor hero gets the rich girl in the end), messianic suggestions (the hero rescues everyone from their dire lot), and so on. Whether true or not (I leave the discourse-hunters to debate the point), FPJ has been deeply influential in defining the Filipino character, or Filipino ideal. Truly, it would be sublimely ironic if he were to be barred from running for not being Filipino!

We do understand intuitively what GMA means when she says she has no doubt FPJ is a Filipino in heart and spirit. Though I wouldn't put it past her to mean that as faint praise: FPJ is a Filipino in heart and spirit but, alas, not so in law and letter. But I doubt anyone will be able to prevent him from running on that ground. You are going to have a riot on your hands, from his legions of fans. What makes the issue less than academic is that, like the attempt to bar Eddie Villanueva from running on the ground that he has no political party, which only calls attention to what political parties really are in this country, any attempt to bar FPJ from running on the ground that he is not a Filipino only calls attention to what a Filipino really is.

You go beyond the letter of the law to what GMA calls "a Filipino in spirit," you have to ask yourself how many of the candidates, presidential or not, can qualify as such. I am almost certain that if you ask the current crop of senators and congressmen to sing the National Anthem and the Pledge of Loyalty, in Filipino or in English (the latter for those who insist on fighting "Manila imperialism," though I haven't heard anyone sing "Land of the Morning" in ages), a great many of them won't pass the test. I am almost certain that if you ask the current crop of governors and mayors questions about what the heroes of the Revolution did, many of them won't be able to pass the test either. You ask them to sing the "Star-Spangled Banner" and give them a test in American history and they might.

The concept of Filipino, like the concept of political parties, being already rubbery in the first place, it's been made even more rubbery by the passage of the "dual citizenship" bill. I know some countries have "dual citizenship," but my objection to it is that our sense of being Filipino is too weak to survive the competition. The most telling sign of it is that elementary school kids continue to answer questionnaires about their citizenship preferences as American, Japanese, Saudi Arabian and Filipino, in that order.

I have no particular love for FPJ as a presidential candidate, though I did look up to him as a cultural icon when I was a kid. But if he isn't Filipino, who is?

Electoral mess

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

EARLY last November, the Supreme Court, acting on the complaint of some citizens seeking to void the Comelec contract with the Mega Pacific Consortium (MPC), assigned the case to Associate Justice Dante Tinga, the most recent appointee of the Macapagal administration to the Court. Tinga submitted his written opinion, upholding the legality of the project, during the last week of the same month. Associate Justice Artemio Panganiban, however, wrote a dissenting opinion and after much deliberation, the latter's position was supported by eight of his colleagues. Thus, Panganiban had to rewrite his dissenting opinion as the majority decision.

Earlier this week, this column, citing inside sources, reported that the Court was coming out with a decision voiding the contract by a vote of 9, with four against and one abstention. Last Tuesday, however, when the Court sat down for its final decision, Justice Leo Quisumbing, one of the four original justices favoring the contract, decided to vote with the majority against it, while Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. joined Justice Jose Vitug in abstaining. Davide reportedly feared that "interfering" with the Comelec's business might affect the coming elections. Thus, the voting became 9 for voiding, three against, and two abstentions.

* * *

The 108-page majority decision was remarkable for its very strong language assailing the Comelec for awarding the contract for the supply of counting machines not only in clear violation of law and jurisprudence but also in "reckless disregard" of its own bidding rules and procedures. It pointed out that the Comelec awarded the contract to MPC, which had not participated in the bidding, but ultimately ended up signing the actual contract with Mega Pacific eSolution, a company that had joined the bidding but failed to meet eight crucial eligibility requirements. Most notable among them were the company's failure to achieve the very high accuracy rating capacity and the machines' failure to reject previously reported entries (so that there would be no multiple entries of same report) and come out with decent audit printouts. The Court lambasted the Comelec for awarding the multi-billion contract with "inexplicable haste" and "focusing only on purchasing the machines" and not caring about the software needed. It directed the Ombudsman to investigate the deal with a view to prosecuting those who entered into it, and the Solicitor General to recover the P850 million already paid by the Comelec.

* * *

The citizens are, to say the least, stunned by the "electoral mess" into which the Comelec has sunk the country and are plainly worried about the conduct of the elections and their credibility. Last Tuesday evening, after the decision came out, a top-level meeting was called in Malacañang to determine what can be done. Attending the meeting with the President were Comelec Chair Benjamin Abalos, Senate President Franklin Drilon, Speaker Jose de Venecia, Rep. Celso Lobregat of the opposition, LP president Rep. Florencio Abad, House Majority Leader Neptali Gonzales Jr. and a couple of others. One eyewitness said Abalos looked like he had been hit by a train.

The officials were concerned about two things: the time left to prepare for the elections and the credibility of the electoral exercise. As Drilon, whom I sought out for reactions to the decision, put it, it is important that elections proceed on May 10, and that the public consider them to be credible. Drilon stressed to Abalos the need for the poll body to conduct its preparations in full transparency before various political groups. He also pointed out in front of the President that the beginnings of the whole fiasco could be traced to Abalos' blind support for Commissioner Luzviminda Tancangco. Drilon also tried to dissuade Abalos from filing a motion for reconsideration since it could only delay preparations for the polls.

Court insiders I've talked to agree: the Comelec should get cracking immediately.

* * *

Among the first people I called for their reactions was Namfrel chair Jose Concepcion, who had gone all out for total computerization earlier. He told me, "We were geared for automatic counting, but with the Court decision we have no alternative but to go manual." Ever the optimist, instead of wringing his hands, JoeCon prefers to sound the bugle for his 200,000 volunteers to get moving and prepare to man the 250,000 precincts around the country. He wants to raise the number of Namfrel volunteers to 500,000 or even 750,000 and is appealing to various citizens' groups for manpower. But he acknowledges that the real cheating could be done in the 1,600 municipal, 36 city and 71 provincial canvassing boards, where entire election returns could be switched.

* * *

The problems we face in the coming elections are mind-boggling. Experts estimate that the entire timetable from producing the dandy roll used for printing ballots up to the nationwide distribution of official ballots will take between 106 and 120 days, assuming everything goes with clockwork precision. The problem is that there are only 115 days left up to May 10. In 1998 Congress canvassed 107 certificates of canvass, but in the coming elections, it will have to canvass 189 certificates, including 82 coming from overseas.

There are suggestions from various quarters for Congress to postpone the elections to May 20 or even May 31, 2004, but national leaders, including the President, the Senate president and the Speaker, are against it for one good reason: it could cause more instability.

The Comelec should buckle down and prepare for a manual count. Also, volunteers are needed to safeguard the integrity of the ballot everywhere.

Wish for the new year

YOUNG BLOOD

Leah Parungao

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

THE NEW Year has passed, but I still have one wish that I must publicly express. I wish that, for one reason or another, Fernando Poe Jr. will drop out of the presidential race.

I know, I know. I'm not in any position to judge FPJ's abilities as a leader. I admire him for what he has done. In fact, I respect him for his contributions to the film industry. He is, beyond doubt, a movie legend.

But the fruit is not yet ripe for the picking. Sure, he has taken short courses in public administration. Many people want him to be president. He's not a traditional politician and he has not been tainted by corruption. And once he gets elected, he can call on many political advisers to make up for his lack of experience.

However, the presidency cannot be learned overnight. To perform well in the highest position in the land, one must be experienced. One must know what he is doing, and not merely follow what his advisers tell him. He cannot be a puppet. He must have a clear vision for the country. He cannot be dependent on others; he must be his own man.

To be brutally honest, the clamor of the poor is not always right. People can be blinded by charisma or someone's heroic image. They are looking for a savior, someone who will lead them out of their hopelessness. They often cannot make a distinction between reel and real life.

I am willing to believe FPJ has no hidden agenda. He is not running for the wrong reasons. If he yearns for public service, so be it. If he wants to help the poor, I have no problem with that. But I'm afraid that seeking the presidency is too much.

His intentions may be pure and honest, but the people around him aren't. He's falling for a trap, one that he may not get out of. It's a trap that might jeopardize both the future of FPJ and, worse, our country.

There is nothing wrong with starting from the bottom. To embark on an enterprise that one cannot handle well is reckless.

I could be wrong of course. And so, I will change my wish: Lord, let our nation be enlightened. May our people choose the right leaders. And let Your will be done.

Leah Parungao, 20, is a 4th year Computer Science student at De La Salle University.

Inspiration and passion

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

AS jurors in the Human Development category (health, sanitation, nutrition and population subcategory) of "Panibagong Paraan," we were faced with a daunting task: to read through 14 proposals for development projects vying for grants of up to P1 million, interview the proponents on the opening day of the "Panibagong Paraan" exhibit, and then rank our choices. The next day, we were to meet with the other 27 jurors and decide on the final list of winners.

We were prepared to work hard, to interrupt our holidays by poring through the documents sent us, and to spend a tiring afternoon walking through the exhibit area and conducting interviews amid the bustle and fuss.

But what I and my fellow jurors—Dr. Mercedes Concepcion, Dr. Eddie Dorotan and Hadja Pombain Karon-Kader—did not expect was that we would find inspiration and hope among the people we met, even those whose project proposals didn't make it. I certainly didn't expect to be so moved by the stories they told and the visible and palpable commitment and passion they brought to the causes they believed in. It just about broke my heart (and I'm sure theirs, too) that we couldn't give all of them the funding they were asking for, though something tells me that even those who didn't get awards would somehow find a way to fund their projects and bring their dream to fruition.

But first, some words about my fellow jurors. Dr. Concepcion is something of a "godmother" among population and reproductive health circles, being "chair emeritus" of the UP Population Institute. Dr. Dorotan is a former mayor of Irosin, Sorsogon, but before and after his stint in politics, he has been a stalwart of the NGO movement especially in Bicol. Hadja Pombain is assistant secretary of the DSWD-ARMM, and vouched for many of the proponents working in the conflict-ridden areas of Mindanao.

* * *

WHILE there are so many stories to tell from "Panibagong Paraan," let me start with the groups that won in our category, in no particular order.

The booth of the Ateneo Human Rights Center, proponent (with the Assisi Development Foundation and Tabang Mindanaw) of the "Free the Indigenous People Legal Assistance Program," showed a family of Aetas breaking free of chains that bound them. Program director Sedfrey Candelaria explained that in the course of providing legal assistance to indigenous communities, they were shocked to discover that more than 200 indigenous Filipinos were in jail on criminal charges that ranged from the trivial to the serious. "But when we interviewed them and probed deeper, we found that the majority of the cases were somehow linked to land disputes or wrangling over ancestral domains and resources and may even have been fabricated," he said.

The project aims to train field coordinators to do research in seven regions around the country and to work with detained indigenous persons, develop a baseline data on the legal status of indigenous persons, identify specific needs to better plan for services, and publish a situation analysis on the results of the research. We thought the project truly innovative in that it targeted a long-neglected population and focused on a problem very few people gave thought to. I was particularly impressed with the potentials for replicating the project, applying the research methods to look into the legal status of other marginalized people—people with disabilities, for instance.

* * *

WHAT impressed us most about the project "Social Franchise System of Medicines" was the use of a proven business model—franchising—to provide the poor people of Davao with a social good: low-cost medicines of proven quality.

The project proponent, Health Management and Research Group Foundation, described it as "like David amongst the Goliath of medicine market players," aiming to reduce the cost of generic drugs to 50 percent less than the current market prices. Already operating a pharmacy from its own small hospital, the HMRG hopes to use its operations as a model for the operation of smaller distribution outlets using the model of social franchising. Already, it has tied up with partners like the Tibungco MR GAD project (which aims to promote men's involvement in reproductive health), San Pablo Parish Social Action Ministry, Brokenshire College Community Extension Office and the Philippine Academy of Family Physicians, Davao City chapter.

Asked what they would do if the funds were not granted, Dr. Camilo Naraval of HMRG said they would proceed with their plans, but perhaps on a smaller scale. Well now, they have the money they need to "scale up" operations.

* * *

"BANTAY Kalusugan sa Paaralan" or "Health Watch in School" combines the resources of Impact Foundation International, the expertise of the Nutrition Center of the Philippines, and the whole-hearted support of the Department of Education. But the most important "players" in the project are the students and their families, who will decide the real outcome of the project.

"Bantay Kalusugan," which will be piloted in four public elementary schools in Balete, Batangas, involves health education by way of age-appropriate materials to be distributed to students, training of their parents on the detection of common diseases that affect Filipino children and monitoring by way of a "health notebook," and referrals to health personnel when needed.

Dr. Florentino Solon, who has devoted over 40 years to the cause of nutrition and health, said the project aims to hit several birds with a single stone: health care for children, skills training and knowledge updating for parents, "after which they, especially mothers, will enjoy higher self-esteem," and better partnerships between school and home.

Like a movie

Jan Andrew D. Zubiri

I AM neither a cinephile nor a movie critic, but I can tell a movie that has quality from one that has none. Despite my meager allowance, I still manage to watch movies to reward myself after surviving a very busy and exhausting week in the university. I do so also to keep me away from things that give me headaches, like exams and politics. The former I can solve by diligence, but I don't know how to deal with the latter.

It has dawned on me that I cannot really escape from my chronic source of headache, which is politics. But then our own brand of politics does not differ much from what we see in the movies. We need to use a lot of imagination to define and describe the country's current political status.

Politics is like a comedy movie. Politicians are clowning around most of the time, forgetting the reason they were chosen by people to play a certain "role." But they are not funny at all. They are not able to elicit cheers and laughter from us, only forced and crooked smiles at best. Comedians say that cracking a joke that the audience does find funny is the biggest sin of all. If that were true, the souls of politicians would be burning now in hell for they have committed this sin and a whole lot more.

Politics is also like an action movie, with so many actors now holding public office. They should have stuck to their craft, but they were duped and made to believe that they could do well as political leaders. They persuaded themselves that they were answering a call to public service and turned out to be ineffective leaders. Unfortunately, they cannot discern reel-life from real life. They think they're still in front of the camera acting like the *bida* when in fact they have become the *kontrabida* in the eyes of the public.

The reverse is also true. There are also politicians who are terrible actors. They present themselves as good guys and knights in shining armors who will save the oppressed, but they end up sending the poor deeper into oppression and depression.

Let's not forget the teasers, posters and commercials that come together with their "shows." These ads assail us every time the election season comes (the third and longest season in the Philippines, after the dry and wet seasons), and people easily get sick of their artificial smiles and irritating looks.

Their face value and well-written blurbs are not important to us. What we need is true-to-life action, not make-believe achievement.

I hope that someday politics will look like a feel-good, fairy tale-like movie where everybody lives happily ever after. Now, that would be real entertainment.

It's not surprising that some people look at politics and show biz as the same. I can understand why. The pomp of politics and the glitz of show biz come with power, fame and fortune.

We should wish that politics were like our favorite scary flick. By just covering or closing our eyes, we can escape from all the gory and terrifying scenes.

But this is not the case. In real life, we cannot just sit back and watch as the terrifying scenes unfold right before our very eyes, without doing anything.

Jan Andrew D. Zubiri, 20, is a senior Human Ecology student at the University of the Philippines, Los Baños.

'Tiangge' of hope

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

WHAT a respite from all the bickering, grandstanding, and the self-promoting antics of politicians. Read their lips and their body language and what do they say?

Friday last week I waded into a virtual *tiangge* of hope, a flea market so to speak, brimming with creativeness and, most of all, with energy. That was the two-day "Panibagong Paraan," the first Philippine Development Innovation Marketplace held at the Megatrade Hall of SM Megamall. The theme was "making services work for the poor" and the key word was "innovativeness."

For the first time, non-government and people's organizations (NGOs and POs) and institutions—or to use a more generic name, civil society groups—came together to sell their ideas. How were their services going to work for the poor?

More than 117 (of the 121) finalists set up booths to display their vision translated into concrete projects that they hoped the World Bank and other funders/donors would "buy" or be interested to help. I liken this big to-do to a *tiangge* or flea market because the participants were mostly community-based stakeholders, small in size but big on hope, big in heart. The atmosphere was both exciting and informal, unlike corporate trade fairs where people walk around in suits smelling of expensive cologne and speak business jargon.

From 1,800 applications from all over the country, the 121 finalists/exhibitors were drawn. These finalists were selected on the basis of the following criteria: innovativeness, partnership, impact and cost-effectiveness, sustainability and replicability.

This batch of finalists was a representative mix from the urban sector (14 percent), agriculture and rural development (15 percent), biodiversity and climate change (9 percent), community-driven development and social development (14 percent), environment (11 percent), human development (23 percent) and enterprise development (13 percent).

These were spread out not so equally in Luzon (50 percent), Visayas (20 percent) and Mindanao (30 percent).

The 50 or so winners were announced at the end of the fair last Saturday and there was great rejoicing. The finalists had earlier been evaluated and prejudged by 33 jurors, all distinguished in their respective fields.

I was supposed to meet some of the lucky proponents last Monday and get familiar with their winning projects, but the call I was waiting for never came. Anyway, the winning projects will be receiving P1 million each. P1 million for a project is not much, but it can go a long way depending on the managerial creativity of the proponent. Those who did not make it can still hope to win the generosity of more than a dozen funding agencies that were there. (I hope so!)

I received the thick summary of proposals, and reading just the project titles gave me a high. Reading on about the problems being addressed, beneficiaries, project sites and the proponents' way of expounding on the benefits, innovative ways, replicability and sustainability made me realize that there is so much energy out there. Now, if only the government and government officials could match these with their own, this country could really leap forward.

So much foreign aid has been poured into this country, and where are we? Many funding agencies have turned their eyes to new frontiers. The Philippines is the NGO capital this part of the world. Teachers' Village in Quezon City is the NGO capital of the Philippines, with so many big NGOs maintaining their headquarters there. The street names there are Filipino words for Filipino traits like Masunurin, Malingap, Malakas, etc. One look at a roster of NGOs and their addresses and you'd know so many of them are clustered in the same place and that there are so many of them there. And there are more elsewhere.

Read on and smile. Here's a sampler of project titles (not proponents). I picked them at random. Many of them are brain-teasers and tongue-twisters and they made me chuckle.

Community-based Peer-to-peer Extension of Reproductive Health Information, Education and Communication in the Que Pa Sa'an Ka Man Areas Around Metro Manila; Basilan Peace in Nature Protocol; My Books: My Pride and Joy for My Country's Future; Building the Capacities of Church-based and Community-Based Mediators through Mentoring and Documentation of Cases; Creating Grassroots Corporate Ethos to Enhance Barangay Development; BT Ikot Tambayan STAR Children's Program; Relodge Rice Technology Application for Multiple Rice Harvesting from Single Planting; Diversified Farming Technology Utilizing System of Rice Intensification as an Enterprise Development Approach for Small Farmers in Nueva Ecija.

Sustainable Alternatives to Mangrove Destruction in Palawan, Integrating Community-based Economic and Enforcement Strategies for Conservation; Rainwater Harvesting for Drinking Water Supply in Tawi-Tawi; Coconut-based Livelihood Generation using Renewable Energy; Win a Scholarship Through the Collection of Recyclables and Frequently-generated Trash (Wishcraft); Empowering the Poor Through Good Governance; Roving Coco-husk Decorticator for the Poor Coconut Farmers in Less Accessible Areas; Large-Scale Cassava Farming; Strengthening of Access to Justice Systems and Community Development Agenda Formulation in 15 Barangays in Bukidnon.

I hope you didn't end up befuddled but hopeful.

* * *

Send comments to cerespd@info.com.ph

THEY SAID

Bigger voice

"We hope that she succeeds in drowning out the pro-Estrada voices behind her standard-bearer."

—Bayan secretary general Teodoro Casiño on vice-presidential candidate Loren Legarda

Party switching

"It's pathetic. *Palipat-lipat, nagsusungkitan, agawan.*"

—Presidential candidate Raul Roco on the switching of sides in both the administration and opposition camps

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A debt long unpaid

THE DEBATE over who should and who should not be "allowed" to dip into the reconstruction jackpot in Iraq (PDI, 12/11, 12/03) is not going to be settled with words, but rather with deeds.

Which is why the selective exclusion of Philippine-based World War II veterans from the increased VA benefits package recently approved by the US Congress, is not only inadequate but wrong, in my opinion.

It should not really matter where these 80-year-old warriors choose to spend their last days. Situation reversed, I'd choose my birth country as well, but that's not the point.

What matters is what they did in World War II to give aid, comfort and support to US military personnel in the allied effort to defeat Japanese forces occupying the Philippines.

Filipino veterans of World War II risked their lives and shed blood as red as any American's, from the Bataan Peninsula in 1942 to the jungles of Mindanao in 1945.

In Iraq, the British stood beside America, joined by peacekeepers from other nations since the so-called end of hostilities last April, including the Philippines.

And, in my opinion, to those who have supported the United States with deeds, not just words, belong the spoils of victory.

Including economic recovery projects in Iraq today and, above all, full VA medical and other benefits long overdue for all Filipinos who put their lives on the line three generations ago in support of Americans in harm's way.

—ELLIOTT ANDERSON,
P.O. Box 2769, Ozamiz City 7200

PAL on several issues aired

WE would like to respond to some issues raised in the columns of Rina Jimenez-David and Solita Monsod (PDI, 12/19, 20/03, respectively) assailing Philippine Airlines and its chair, Lucio Tan.

The Qatar issue. The RP-Qatar air treaty does not provide for fifth freedom traffic rights to either party, only third and fourth freedom rights. The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) approved in 2003 Qatar Airways' application for a Doha-Cebu operation with a technical stop in Bangkok. On Oct. 2, 2003, while the CAB executive director was in Cebu on official business, Qatar Air amended its filing with a routing via Singapore (instead of Bangkok), with a notation that it would carry fifth freedom traffic between Singapore and Cebu. The CAB officer in charge made the mistake of routinely granting the amended filing, thus inadvertently including what should not have been granted—fifth freedom traffic rights. The CAB executive director corrected the error and he was lambasted for it. The one who made the mistake got away scot-free.

Agents of foreign interests. Alberto Lim admits he is a founding member of the Freedom to Fly Coalition (FFC). Members of the group say they are doing a crusade for the riding public from the bottom of their hearts and the generosity of their pockets, only to be revealed as paid agents of Agile, the Philippine arm of the US Agency for International Development. I was present at the Senate hearing when Sen. Sergio Osmeña III drew an admission from FFC president Mila Abad that her group was indeed receiving remuneration from Agile.

PAL in rehabilitation. Contrary to Lim's claim that PAL is a "dying" airline, it is in fact rising like the phoenix from its ashes. Today, there are giant airlines undergoing rehabilitation, like United Airlines, which could not hack it on its own and had to be bailed out by the US government. For our part, we weathered extraordinary crises. We have even paid nearly half our total obligation ahead of schedule, to our creditors' satisfaction.

On tourism. Lim claims that "tourism cannot grow because PAL does not want our country's frequencies to grow since it cannot expand its fleet accordingly." First, it sounds as if the entire tourism industry is dependent on just one player. The poor state of our tourism is due to many factors—lack of infrastructure (airports, access to tourist spots), peace and order problem, slow destination development, etc. But Lim heaps all the blame on PAL despite the fact that PAL has been insistent in aeropolitical negotiations to open Cebu, Davao, Clark and other secondary destinations to foreign airlines. Over 40 international carriers have entitlements to fly to these provincial points. But they prefer to concentrate on Manila and carry Filipino traffic (overseas workers and *balikbayan*) instead of bringing in tourists. On the other hand, PAL carries the bulk of tourist arrivals into the country. No other foreign airline—not Korean Air or Japan Airlines—operates scheduled services between Cebu and its home base despite having the traffic rights to do so. PAL is virtually alone in this task and yet we are labeled an obstacle to tourism.

On government takeover of PAL. Lim cites Vietnam's tourism program as a success story and implies that much of the credit should go to the state-owned flag-carrier, Vietnam Airlines. He is actually espousing that the government reverse the privatization of PAL so that the airline can revert to government ownership. Yet, the government has had innumerable chances to make PAL a successful airline but failed.

—AVELINO L. ZAPANTA,
president and COO,
Philippine Airlines,
Makati City

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER LETTERS

Review of IRRI's charter imperative

WHEN the House's committee on labor and employment released Committee Report No. 1394 last April 28, 2003, the aggrieved workers and farmworkers of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) somehow glimpsed a ray of hope. The report recommends the approval of House Bill No. 5095 without amendments, thus 27 congressmen signed the report. Unfortunately, Congress did not pursue the noble cause of HB 5095.

HB 5095 is an act protecting the rights to labor of the workers of IRRI as enshrined in the 1987 Constitution, amending for the purpose Article 3 of Presidential Decree No. 1620 and for other purposes.

PD 1620 was issued on April 19, 1979, granting IRRI the status, prerogatives, privileges and immunities of an international organization. This is blatantly anomalous considering that PD 1620 is not a treaty between two or more sovereign states that could vest international legal personality upon IRRI. This was confirmed by the Philippines belatedly with the signing of what purports to be an "agreement" with other countries dated May 19, 1996 but which, however, has not been ratified by the Philippine Senate.

IRRI is not an international organization since it was created through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Philippine government and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, both of which are private organizations, not states. Obviously, the immunities derive not from international law but from a presidential decree issued under the martial law regime which is a unilateral act of a dictator against his own people. IRRI is not a specialized agency under the UN charter either. And under unusual circumstance, only the Philippine government recognizes IRRI as an international organization.

The provisions of PD 1620 gravely infringes on the constitutional rights of Filipino workers to self-organization, due process and to equal application of the law. Several cases of illegal termination and unfair labor practices have transpired in IRRI since 1989. The latest case of illegal retrenchment filed against IRRI at the labor department was dismissed last Oct. 28, 2003 not on merit but simply because of immunity.

Further, PD 1620 contravenes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly the provisions of Article 7 and Article 20. It also suppressed the International Labor Organization declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work such as freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

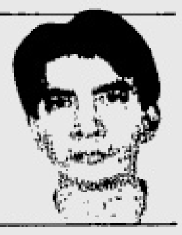
Since 1989, the Filipino workers and farmworkers have been engaged in a painstaking struggle against despotic characters of the IRRI management as part of their dignified efforts to regain their rights in their own land. But then, the government agencies which are supposed to uphold the rights of Filipino workers became paranoid instead.

IRRI has been in the Philippines for more than 40 years but we have been importing rice for almost 25 years. Yes, IRRI may have its own contribution to rice production but this is not sufficient to curtail the rights and dignity of Filipino workers. We certainly hope that the lawmaking bodies will finally realize the truth behind IRRI. And we earnestly pray that the judicial bodies will finally reconsider their assertion that IRRI is an international organization in the context of international law—in the name of justice and human rights!

—PATRICIO M. LAYOSA JR.,
acting president,
Brotherhood of IRRI Support Services Group
(BISSIG), c/o 34-A 3/F Building I,
Sambahayan Condominium,
Makaturing St., Mandaluyong City

How to encourage more heinous crimes

PINOY KASI



Michael L. Tan

THE COUNTDOWN begins toward Jan. 30 when two Filipinos, Roberto Lara and Roderick Licayan, are scheduled to be executed, allegedly for kidnapping. The executions will break a four-year moratorium on capital punishment and is supposed to deter kidnapping and other heinous crimes.

I'm afraid the exact opposite will happen, especially since these two men's executions are being touted as examples of the government's "effective" battle against crime.

Lara has long claimed that he was not involved in the kidnapping, and that he had "confessed" because the police had beaten him up. He admits he knew who the kidnappers were, one of them being his own uncle. The police know this, too, and have had the names of seven other suspects in that kidnapping case. It was only last week that they arrested two of the other suspects: Pedro Mabansag, Lara's uncle, and Noel de los Reyes. Both Mabansag and De los Reyes have admitted they were involved in the kidnapping, and, even more importantly, have declared that Lara had nothing to do with the crime.

Since then, the government's own Public Attorney's Office (PAO) has been frantically trying to reopen the case, apparently unsuccessfully. The PAO argues that even if Lara and Licayan were involved in the kidnapping, they should not be executed until the co-accused are tried since the two Death Row inmates could be used as state witnesses. I would further argue that a trial might bring out more details that could exonerate Lara and Licayan, either proving them completely innocent, or guilty to a milder degree.

But the government seems intent on pushing through with the executions, especially with elections coming around and the President intent on proving she's "serious" about law and order.

I couldn't think of a more serious miscarriage of justice, given the new information that has emerged on the case of Lara and Licayan. Guilty or not, their execution, without further hearings, will only further embolden kidnapping and drug syndicates.

Why? Because this will only confirm how easy it is to get around our police and our courts. Lara has claimed he was a fall guy, beaten up to force a confession. We all know this happens all too often. All the criminals need to do is to lie low after a heist—and this is easy given that they often have protectors from within the law enforcement agencies until a fall guy is presented and convicted.

Let me take a quick detour and talk about recent developments in the United States, one of the last developed countries still meting out capital punishment. A majority of Americans still favors the death penalty, but support is dwindling, mainly because of the growing number of death row convicts being exonerated through DNA testing. These tests match body tissues or fluid samples from crime victims with that of a suspect. This matching can be done many years after a crime is committed. Because of this DNA testing, more than 100 death row inmates' cases have been reviewed, resulting in the convicts being declared innocent.

If so many wrongful convictions can happen in an advanced country like the United States, one can imagine how many innocent men and women are being sent to our death row, even as the guilty, inevitably the rich and powerful, run free. As a member of the Chinoy community, so terribly vulnerable to kidnappings, I will be even more anxious after Lara and Licayan are executed, knowing now that crime does pay in the Philippines, and how the innocent are so easily framed up to pay, with their lives, for others' crimes.

We should note another important development in the United States, and this is an appeal filed last week with the New York Court of Appeals for Angel Mateo, a man sentenced to death for four murders. Note that this convicted man has admitted he killed four people and has written: "I think I should get the death penalty for the things I did."

At present, the prescribed standard of proof used for death penalty convictions in the United States is "beyond a reasonable doubt." Mateo's lawyers say that is inadequate and should be raised to "beyond any doubt."

That argument has actually been supported by death penalty proponents, who feel that there will be more support for capital punishment if the public is assured that only the guilty are executed. The New York Times quotes Frank Keating, a conservative Republican and former governor of Oklahoma:

"I am certainly no shrinking civil libertarian, but I think if you're going to take somebody else's life, you need to be convinced to a moral certainty."

Our officials at the Department of Justice should be considering this point about moral certainty and listen to the PAO's appeal to reopen the Lara-Licayan case. If this is not done, then it is the President who assumes the burden of reflecting on moral certainty. I hope she can prove that the executions aren't being done as part of her re-election bid. Only she will have the power to stop the execution, even as late as Jan. 30, when Bilibid's injection chamber once again comes to lethal life.

* * *

Comments to miguel@pinoykasi.net

To preserve unity in Aquino family

ALLOW us to correct a point raised by Neal Cruz in his Jan. 6, 2004 column when he mentioned the non-inclusion of Sen. Tessie Aquino-Oreta in the senatorial slate of the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KNP) led by its standard-bearer, Fernando Poe Jr.

We wish to point out that Oreta was included in the shortlist of the KNP senatorial candidates and was being convinced even till the last minute to join the ticket by Poe and the other KNP leaders. But she, however, chose to forego another term, despite the strong support of Poe and her advantage as an incumbent, to preserve the unity of the Aquino family.

With her uncle, former Rep. Hermie Aquino running as the vice-presidential candidate of Aksyon Demokratiko, and her brother, Rep. Butz Aquino leading the group supporting the presidential bid of Sen. Panfilo Lacson, Oreta believes that the last thing that her family and the Filipino electorate need right now is another Aquino running in yet another anti-administration ticket.

Oreta's decision does not mean that she is leaving the political arena permanently. She will be very active in the campaign of Poe and the KNP ticket for she firmly believes that Poe would lead the nation toward the path of unity and prosperity and would pursue her advocacy of making quality basic education available to all Filipinos.

—BRIAN RAYMUND YAMSUAN,
chief of staff for political affairs,
Office of Sen. Tessie Aquino-Oreta,
Rm. 511, GSIS Bldg., Pasay City

Hodel was no sadomasochist

IN ONE of your Sunday issues for the month of August 2003, an article by John Silva appeared with comments on the New York Times Review of a book written by Steve Hodel, in which the author claims that he is almost sure that the serial killer of the Black Dhalia that occurred several decades ago in Los Angeles, California was none other than his father, Dr. Georg Hill Hodel. Silva in his article mentions me as having been the Filipina wife of Dr. Georg Hodel, whom I divorced and with whom I have four children, one of whom was Ramon Hodel, a very good friend of Silva.

Since that article appeared in August, I had a few confrontations from friends and acquaintances regarding the article of Silva.

I strongly deny any indication that Dr. Hodel was a sadomasochist.

It is only fair that the memory of Dr. Hodel who lived in the Philippines for several decades and died in San Francisco in the year 2000, be rectified and not smeared by false allegations.

Steve Hodel, son of Dr. Georg Hodel from a former wife, is a professional detective and if he succeeded in writing a best seller, we shall leave that as his reward as a writer of pure fiction.

—HORTENSIA L. STARKE,
Unit 1805, Renaissance 2000,
Meralco Avenue, Pasig City

Mr. Vilma Santos, not Ms Ralph Recto

THIS is a reaction to the column of Honesto C. General. (PDI, 12/22/03) In it he stated from among others, "Without meaning to take anything away from Vilma Santos, she won because Lipa City is her husband's bailiwick."

I take exception. The reverse is true. You have yet to see a ballot cast for Ms Ralph Recto, but I can swear and factly tell you that there were numerous ballots which stated "Mr. Vilma Santos" in the elections in Lipa City.

I have witnessed precincts in Lipa City where this was a common occurrence. I am also a registered voter in Lipa City.

Credit should be given where it is due. Fact is, it was Vilma Santos who campaigned for then congressional aspirant Ralph G. Recto. Presently, Sen. Ralph G. Recto may have proven his worth in gold but certainly General has taken and will be taking many things away from Vilma Santos should he stick to such a belief. I'll double his case of beer, if he can state the reverse as true.

—LUIS A. ILAGAN JR.,
7 Kalipulako St., Lipa City

No 'jueteng' operations observed in Zambo Sur

THIS pertains to a news item last Dec. 26, 2003 titled, "Jueteng-free country? Just a Christmas wish." The item featured the country's undertaking against illegal gambling and quoted PNP Director General Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. as saying that Zamboanga del Sur is among those areas that have not yet been declared as *jueteng*-free.

This is to inform the INQUIRER that as far as the area of the Zamboanga Peninsula is concerned (which embodies Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay and Zamboanga del Norte), the illegal numbers games which include *jueteng*, masiao, or any organized syndicated illegal numbers game operations, have not been monitored in the area for a long time now. This is supported by the certificates issued by the provincial and city directors of Police Regional Office 9 and concurred in by different religious leaders in the region.

This office will continuously carry out its duties in support of the PNP's thrust against anti-illegal gambling activities.

—SERVANDO MINA HIZON,
police chief superintendent,
regional director, Police Regional Office 9,
Camp Col. Romeo A. Abendan, Mercedes,
Zamboanga City

An unusual politician

AMID the "Theater of the absurd," as the INQUIRER editorial aptly described the immoral and unprincipled scramble for slots in the major political parties for national (and local) positions by politicians, pseudostatesmen, turncoats and clowns, there appeared a brief article in your newspaper titled, "Ted Failon picks media over politics."

As a citizen already losing hope for the future of our country, I saw a flickering light of hope in people like Failon. In 1991, Failon upset an incumbent Romualdez (who is married to a pretty and popular actress) in the congressional elections in Leyte, the bastion of the Romualdez dynasty. Failon could have chosen to vie for reelection with decisive advantage against any opponent this time around. Or he could have opted to seek a seat in the Senate.

Undoubtedly, the major political parties would welcome another popular TV anchorman after Noli de Castro and Loren Legarda topped their respective elections for senators and are now facing each other for the vice-presidency of the land. (Unlike Failon, De Castro and Legarda did not even hold any public office before becoming senators.) Again, as candidate for senator, with his name recall and familiar face, Failon is assured of landing in the magic 12 in the Senate race.

But, as the article reported, he called traditional politics as the "godfather of corruption" and that he was disappointed "after seeing many of his political allies whom he supported in 2001 turning out to be worse *trapos* than their rivals." He vowed to continue fighting corruption and introduce new politics instead, in the media.

I may disagree with him with his sponsorship of the Medical Malpractice Bill but, for me, rare is a Filipino politician like him who exercises extreme self sacrifice by giving up power, prestige and money traditionally correlated with public office and who continues to pursue his dreams for his people outside the realm of politics.

—DANNY CO,
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Seized girl, parents reunite after 5 yrs

By Marc Villavicencio
PDI Visayas Bureau

CATARMAN, Northern Samar—It was a tearful reunion for a 10-year-old girl and her parents after five years of separation.

The girl, Aiza, was kidnapped when she was only five years old in 1998. She ended up in the care of another woman who decided to return her to her family because she was the wife of a communist rebel and could not give the child a bright future.

The homecoming last week was not that easy for Aiza who has lived with New People's Army guerrillas in Abra, Occidental Mindoro for almost five years.

Here was the poignant story that captured the sympathy of the local media and the police in the search for Aiza's real parents.

The story started early this month when Elena Lastimosa, 47, married and a resident of Abra, Occidental Mindoro, contacted a local radio station to help her find the parents of a 10-year-old girl, who she claimed was kidnapped from a family from Catarman.

Zendah Sudio, Samar Times bureau chief and a local radio broadcaster, immediately contacted Northern Samar Provincial Police Chief Supt. Isaias Tonog for coordination in the search.

Painful decision

Lastimosa said that she made the painful decision to return the child to her biological parents because she was a wife of an NPA guerrilla and that Aiza had a bleak future with them.

The real parents of Aiza were then only identified as "Mommy Freda" and "Daddy Sammy."

It took only three hours for the radio station and two other reporters to locate the child's father, who asked that he be only identified as "Dodong."

The father was very happy and quickly produced photographs to prove that Aiza was his daughter.

Aiza was last seen May 31, 1998. She was believed to have been kidnapped by a certain Elena "Lyn lyn" de Guzman.

The father said De Guzman arrived in their house on the second week of May 1998 claiming to be their relative. She stayed with them for a week and when she left, she took the child with her.

The father said that they reported the abduction to the National Bureau of Investigation in Manila and sought the help of different media organizations to help locate the child but without results.

"Inday," Dodong's wife, said that she has not stopped praying for the safe return of her child since the day she disappeared.

Lastimosa said Lyn lyn was an NPA member. After Lyn lyn became ill, she entrusted the child to her.

"I accepted Aiza because then my son was killed by soldiers," Lastimosa said. She even filed a birth certificate for Aiza because she did not know the child's real name.

"I loved the child more than my life and it is painful that we are going to be separated since I cannot give her a better life because my husband is an NPA guerrilla," she said.

Sacrifice

Lastimosa said she was forced to sell their only carabao to pay for the treatment of the child when she became gravely ill.

Despite the security threat to them, Lastimosa said she was able to send Aiza to school in Abra, Mindoro Occidental.

"I loved Aiza because she was thoughtful and intelligent. Her grades were high and I let her join the band. I even bought her a cellular phone but it was stolen from her," said Lastimosa.

Lastimosa said she decided to reunite Aiza with her real parents because the child was growing up to be a real insurgent. She said Aiza had no future with the guerrillas in the mountains.

Aiza herself recounted the spartan life of the NPAs in the hills, saying that her foster father made her a hammock in which to sleep.

"My father has many guns. He has a long rifle and several pistols which he keeps in a bag," Aiza said.

The homecoming was very painful to the child when she realized that she would be forever separated from her foster mother.

"Don't leave me here. I am used to eating nothing," Aiza cried. It was a scene that brought tears to some of the media practitioners and policemen present.

Lastimosa stayed in this town for a few days before she returned to Occidental Mindoro early this week.

C. Luzon top cop confirms 'jueteng' back

CAMP OLIVAS, Pampanga—The top police commander in Central Luzon on Tuesday confirmed the resurgence of the outlawed numbers game jueteng in several parts of President Macapagal-Arroyo's home region since last week.

Chief Supt. Vidal Querol said he had directed the police directors in the region's seven provinces and five cities to mobilize additional forces in what he called a continuing campaign against illegal gambling.

"We're running after them," he told the INQUIRER.

A report describing the extent or scope of the game has not been made available yet but Querol said an assessment was being updated in areas where the game made a full or limited comeback.

He made the confirmation even as he lamented that the strides of the anti-jueteng campaign in the region would disappoint Philippine National Police chief, Director Gen. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr.

Amid skepticism and doubts, Ebdane on Christmas Eve declared the entire country jueteng-free.

While the PNP chief made such a claim, Querol had not made public statements declaring the same status for Central Luzon.

A police colonel who requested not to be identified said jueteng has not ceased in Angeles City, north of this camp.

But the game stopped for almost two weeks in the City of San Fernando and elsewhere in the region, it was learned.

On Monday, however, several sources in the jueteng trade said the game has restarted in Pampanga's capital city. "It's normal as it used to be," a bet collector said, adding he and hundreds of others dependent on jueteng for employment had asked the financiers to resume the game.

"The police want it stopped but mayors do not think of ways to give us jobs. How are we going to live?" the collector asked.

On Monday, police arrested 10 jueteng collectors. *Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

LEONCIO BALBIN/PDI PHOTO

SURVIVOR
A member of the St. Benedictine Nuns of the Eucharistic King looks with sadness at a burned image of St. Scholastica that was among items that suffered damages when fire hit the nuns' chapel in Vigan City. The nuns' three-story building was also destroyed in the fire Jan. 13.

33 Lakas bets declared 'independents'

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—Negros Occidental elections supervisor Marsha Cordero Monday declared 33 Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats candidates in Bacolod City and Pulupandan town as independents.

The move was prompted by the failure of the candidates to meet the Jan. 9 deadline to trim the list of official candidates.

Declared independents were 14 Lakas candidates for Bacolod councilors and two candidates for mayor, two for vice mayor and 15 for councilors of Pulupandan.

Running for mayor of Pulupandan under Lakas-CMD were Luis Mondia and businessman Anthony Gerard Suatengco, while for vice mayor were Julia Seminio and Antonio Suatengco.

The 15 Lakas candidates for councilor of Pulupandan were Genaro Animay, Herman Araneta Jr., Lisa Marie Bantigue, Emmanuel Castañeda, Emerson Cepida, Herman Donasco, George Dulman, Wesley Espinosa, Alan Jacildo, Alberto Jacildo, Salvador Javier, Teodoro Lim, Edda Ponce, Ronald Tenero and Alfabeto Udani.

The 14 Lakas Bacolod candidates declared independents were Catalino Alisbo, Homer Bais, Jesus Antonio Coscolluela, Al Victor Espino, El Cid Familiaran, Greg Gasataya, Reynold Iledan, Elizabeth Katalbas, Ana Marie Palermo, Dindo Ramos, Raymundo Sapa Sr., Elmer Sy, Brigid Tan, and Sandy Villano.

Bacolod Mayor Luzviminda Valdez urged the Lakas to solve the confusion brought about by the party decision authorizing her and Rep. Monico Puentevella to nominate their own candidates.

Cop probing PNP bad eggs ambushed, slain

BUTUAN CITY—Three motorcycle-riding men shot and killed a police captain in the remote village of Bucac, Bayugan in Agusan del Sur on Monday night.

Senior Insp. Jerry Ratunil, police chief of Bayugan, identified the victim as Senior Insp. Clotildo Almidilla, 55, head of the Agusan del Sur Provincial Internal Affairs Service (PIAS).

Ratunil said Almidilla was riding a motorcycle when he was killed. The assailants, said Ratunil, blocked his way and started firing as the victim stopped at around 11:30 p.m.

As PIAS chief, Almidilla was hearing and overseeing cases and complaints filed against erring policemen in the province.

Ratunil said the motive of the killing could be related to the work of Almidilla. *Franklin Caliguid, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Drug center fund scam, abuses probed

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CAMP OLIVAS, Pampanga—Police have begun an investigation of the alleged financial irregularities and maltreatment of patients at the Central Luzon Drug Rehabilitation Center (CLDRC).

Senior Supt. Paul Mascarinas, chief of the regional police's Criminal Investigation and Detection Unit, said the inquiry was prompted by complaints from the directors of the nongovernment organization Sagip Bie Foundation and several parents.

The Central Luzon police and the foundation jointly manage the center, the only such facility in the region. The center opened in March 2000 at the foothills of Mt. Arayat in Magalang town.

Mascarinas said the investigation involved Senior Supt. Conrado Briton, CLDRC executive director, and its staff composed mostly of police personnel.

Walfrido Katigbak, the treasurer of the Sagip Bie, told the INQUIRER he took a leave of absence after Briton refused to submit financial reports to the foundation in the last seven months. He said the center receives an average of P2 million monthly from private donations.

"I have not been able to function and I do not want to lend my name to an institution that I now doubt," Katigbak said.

Briton downplayed the investigation, saying it could be the handiwork of his detractors. He also said drug lords could be "possibly at work" because they were "hurting" from the center's operations.

In previous interviews with the INQUIRER, he said the center helps in reducing the number of drug users through a six-month rehabilitation program.

Briton claimed he submitted a financial report to the foundation on Monday. The report explained how his team used almost P44 million of donations raised by the foundation and those generated from local governments and national agencies last year.

The controversy has shaken what has been touted as a strong police-private sector partnership in the fight against illegal drugs.

Mascarinas said at least 73 patients claimed that they were whipped or paddled with bamboo sticks as a form of punishment. He said at least 17 patients were released to their parents or guardians on Monday night.

Mascarinas said the buttocks of these patients showed welts indicating that they were hit by paddles.

But Briton said it was not the policy of the center to use force when disciplining the patients. He admitted though that several CLDRC staff members "punished" some who committed "gross violations of house rules."

He did not say what these violations were and what kind of punishments were given.

More than 3,000 patients, mostly males, had undergone rehabilitation at the center.

Bullets killed 12 amid gun ban

ZAMBOANGA CITY—At least a dozen people have died from gunshots here since the start of the year despite the implementation of a gun ban in connection with the forthcoming elections.

Police authorities said four of those who died were victims of summary executions.

The body of the latest victim of summary execution was found in Barangay Mercedes here around 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

But Supt. Mario Yanga, city police director, said political, business or family rivalries were still the main reasons behind the gun deaths.

"People from other places who are locked in disputes with each other were bringing their trouble here," Yanga said.

Mayor Erico Basilio Fabian said he was alarmed over the practice of some families to violently settle their feuds here.

"I know we have limitations but I am appealing to this group not to bring their troubles here," Fabian said when asked why police were seemingly helpless. *Julie Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

OBJECTIVE SEEN INSURANCE

Wife of murdered US Navy man tagged mastermind

BAGABAG, Nueva Vizcaya—Members of the family of a retired US Navy serviceman, who was killed in December last year, have filed murder charges against four persons, including the murdered serviceman's wife, for allegedly masterminding his murder.

Florencio and Florence Afalla, father and brother, respectively, of murdered former US Navy man Henry Afalla filed the case on Dec. 29 last year against his wife Melonie Afalla, former Board Member Clemente Bacani, barangay captain Sidioc Uy and businessman Jolly Zapata before the municipal trial court in Solano town.

Also charged were two unidentified suspects. Melonie is the sister of Bacani, who is now in the United States.

Afalla, 48, was spending his Christmas vacation here when he was gunned down by unidentified assassins in Barangay Quezon in Solano on Dec. 9 last year.

Masterminds

In their complaint, the Afallas accused the suspects of masterminding the murder of Henry.

Henry, who stayed in California after his retirement from the US Navy, petitioned for divorce from his wife Melonie in California. The couple has two children.

Florence Afalla said his brother, who was insured for $200,000, filed the divorce case against his wife due to misunderstanding and jealousy. The late Afalla had reportedly a live-in partner here.

"If the case will be decided, most of the benefits will be given to their son and daughter," Florence said.

He added that before his brother's death, Henry told him that if he would die, the police should arrest Zapata and Bacani.

During his brother's wake and burial, his wife Melonie never came home, Florence added.

Threats

In her affidavit, Lourdes Catacutan, Henry's live-in partner, also said Melonie called her before Henry was murdered, and threatened to kill her.

"She told me that I should leave Henry if I do not want to be involved. She said she can pay people who can kill Henry," Catacutan said.

She added that Melonie had told her that she had already ordered Zapata to monitor their movements.

In a telephone interview, Zapata dismissed as "mere hearsay" the accusation against him and his co-accused. "They are pinpointing the wrong guys. *Wala akong kinalaman diyan* (I do not have any knowledge on that). I am just a plain businessman," he said.

Zapata said he was surprised why he was implicated in the case. "*Masama naman 'yan* (That is not good). I do not even have a criminal record and I do not have any grudge (against) the victim," he added. *Ben Moses Ebreo, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

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INQUIRER Southern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Floreño G. Solmirano

The miracle of Naga City

MOST Cebuanos have nary an inkling about Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo or the inspiring economic miracle he has authored in his little corner of sleepy Bicolandia.

Robredo certainly isn't as swashbuckling as Tomas Osmeña, the Cebu City mayor who has driven giant telecom firms to their knees, imposed his will on intractable vendors and taxi drivers, crossed swords with political gladiators and, despite a foreign debt that would take forever to compute and pay, vowed to make Cebu City "No. 1 again."

BREAKAWAY

Ivan Suansing

Yet what this Bicolano has done is something most of his peers can only dream about. Anchored on the principle of "growth with equity," Robredo's administration has transformed Naga into one of the Philippines' fastest growing economies with an average growth rate of 6.5 percent and, more importantly, into a "community for all."

For this feat, Asiaweek named Naga as one of the four most improved cities in Asia.

How did Robredo pull it off? A recent seminar sponsored by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) for Filipino and Indonesian journalists in Davao City, which featured Naga as among the best models for better access to information, unveiled his "secret."

He started off by reversing the culture of corruption, "where honest people are discriminated against and the role model is one whose success is measured by his skills in fixing deals," demanding transparency in transactions and giving life to the Local Government Code's command to empower the people.

Aside from the City Development Council, the Naga City government created special bodies, which were stuffed with private sector representatives, to fast-track priority projects in housing, livelihood and the environment.

In 1995, it enacted a landmark legislation, the "Empowerment Ordinance" which further expanded the people's role in governance through the Naga City People's Council (NCPC), a "framework for partnership" with close to 100 NGOs and people's organizations.

NCPC representatives sit in all the local special bodies and city council committees, and take part not only in the policy-making process but also in project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The council is the watchdog that Robredo and his allies, who have completely dominated city politics since 1992, appointed to eliminate "opportunities for collusion."

In 2001, the Naga City government introduced the "i-Governance" program to institutionalize the role of community organizations and provide more venues for information openness.

The program includes the concepts of inclusive governance ("embracing, rather than excluding the private sector from running the government"), information openness ("information is truly empowering when placed at the hands of citizens"), interactive engagement ("putting a premium on information exchange through dialogue between authority and constituency") and innovative management ("a commitment to a culture of excellence and creativity").

City Hall has distributed copies of the Naga City Citizens Charter, both in English and in the vernacular, to Naga's 27,000 households.

This guidebook on key services of the city government contains step-by-step procedures on how to avail oneself of the city's more than 150 frontline services, the response time for delivery, the officers and staff members responsible for the service, and maps of offices.

In the past, it was "if you want something done, you should look for someone you know." Not anymore.

Naga's website offers downloadable forms commonly used in City Hall transactions.

As a matter of policy, no request for supplies and equipment or infrastructure involving at least P100,000 are processed unless they are posted on the city website.

With hits of up to 1,300 a day, the website has been hailed by the United Nations for "going from a technology-driven to a people empowerment tool."

Through a transparent procurement process, the city government saves at least P10 million a year, according to the paper read on Robredo's behalf at the CMFR conference.

Freely provided information on bids and awards has pulled down project costs. For example, against a government standard of P6 million to P7 million to construct a kilometer of road, Naga spends only P4.06 million, said Robredo's report.

On the other hand, medicines procured by the city are 19-70 percent lower than the prices quoted for other local governments. Supplies bought by the General Services Division can be up to 33 percent lower than the government standard.

The World Bank considers Naga a model in procurement in a country that has lost $48 billion to corruption over the past 20 years.

No-twilight zone in Pototan

By Gil Francis G. Arevalo
Legazpi City

MANY caves in Bicol have been explored and written about, but only a few people know about the Pototan Cave in the forests of Albay's Batan Island.

The coal-rich island is sandwiched by two others, Cagraray and Rapu-Rapu, and lies east of Legazpi City. Travel from Legazpi port to Batan takes about one and one-half hours by motorized boat.

Policarpio "Carpo" Sanchez, 37, a resident of Batan since 1967, disclosed that only a few Albayanos have visited or explored the Pototan Cave, although its name seems to be familiar among the people in the province. It is still considered "unexplored," he said.

Sanchez is among the few who have "conquered" the cave, going there several times since 1996. He has served as a guide to those who have dared unravel its mystery, though he claimed that no one has really explored its depth.

Seven hours

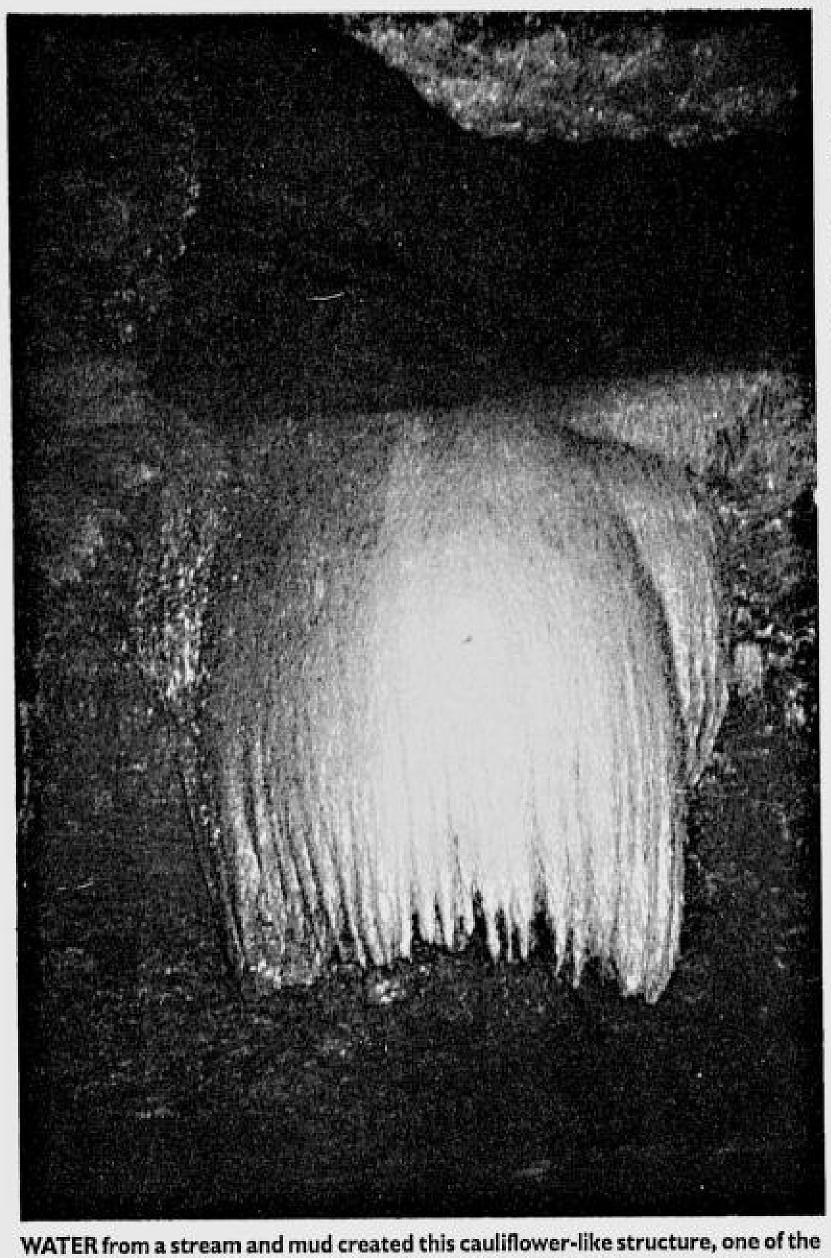
It takes five to seven hours of mountain climbing and trekking from the main Batan area to reach the cave, Sanchez said. Six to eight hours more are needed to explore its entrance and different zones, said the guide, who has gone through the cave from end to end.

From the entrance, one wades half a kilometer in water, after which only scuba divers can proceed because the water level is at least six meters deep.

Batan is still considered an isolated island, Sanchez said. Pototan's wilderness bewilders residents of the island and the neighboring Cagraray.

Exotic

Unlike other caves in the region, Pototan teems with terraces of waterfall-like contours that were formed by water spilling from a cauliflower-shaped structure of stalactites called the "Busay."



WATER from a stream and mud created this cauliflower-like structure, one of the main attractions of the Pototan Cave in Albay's Batan Island. JASON ARAGON

Busay has vertical potholes through which crystal-clear water flows. Its shape makes one wonder how it was formed from the stream and mud.

Spelunkers will immediately be attracted by the "drip curtain" of stalactites.

During the rainy season, the cave's entrance area is rocky and water accumulates up to two meters deep, building up waves that can become turbulent.

"It's not advisable to go inside the Pototan during the rainy season because the water in the cave can reach even up to eight meters," Sanchez said.

Consejo Balaguer, 35, councilor of Barangay Misibis, said the cave was usually filled with water, making it impassable for tourists and explorers, even if they were adequately equipped.

Total darkness

Pototan has a zone of total darkness. That's why those who want to roam inside need flashlights or "*katipong*" (torches).

But wading in the dark has a reward. One can see the splendor of a balcony-like structure of stalactites and the "towering" chamber. From the chamber's top, water flows from a stream.

Another stunning feature is the columns of joint stalactites and stalagmites.

Wild and exotic animals, such as bats, "*kasili*" (cray fish), crabs, shrimps, and even "*sawa*" (pythons), are found in the cave. There are many pythons, especially at the entrance zone, Sanchez said. But he added that no one has been attacked so far.

"The python comes out during the dry season but the presence of hunters like us somehow threatens them. We have already hunted and killed a bunch of *sawa* since 1996. So far, no tourist has been injured and killed by any," Sanchez claimed.

Legend

Residents of Barangay Misibis recount a story passed through generations about a man, now called an "old hermit," who had been trapped inside the cave for the past centuries due to heavy rains and erosion.

His body was preserved in a sitting position on a stone, the legend goes.

Sanchez said some tourists pay homage to the stone image. "Some even recite prayers, bring simple gifts, such as food and flowers, while others light candles for him. They believe that this old hermit brings good luck to them and even charm to the peculiar beauty of this cave."

Tourists or adventurers who wish to visit Pototan no longer have to go to the main Batan Island area anymore to reach the place. A road has been built from Barangay Sula in Sto. Domingo town going to Barangay Misibis in Cagraray.

Taking the road, visitors can now reach Barangay Mosboron, a preferred take-off point to Pototan. From Mosboron, it takes only 40 minutes to reach the cave.

The goodness of Badbad, Mangyan 'midwife'

By Madonna T. Virola
Calapan City

HE RUSHED to his Tagalog friends in Calapan City for a day to celebrate Christmas with them. Then, he had to rush back home because his daughter was giving birth in the mountains of Mansalay town, 145 km south of Oriental Mindoro's capital.

Fondly called Badbad by his friends, the 51-year-old Mangyan is not bad after all. Very different from other Mangyan folk who have acquired the habit of asking for gifts during the Christmas holidays, Badbad (or Gudgud as his Tagalog friends play on his name) would bring down from the mountain his gifts of homemade broom, *kaong* (sugar palm) to be cooked for sweet delicacy, native wallets and others.

On Dec. 24-25, he spent Christmas with his friends in Calapan.

Compromise

"They told me not to stay away for long," Badbad said, referring to his family. So as not to disappoint his friends who expect his yearly visit, he had agreed with his family to spend Dec. 24 and Dec. 31 with them.

True to his promise, he went back to the mountains on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

"It's because we would pay higher if others would assist in the delivery of the baby. P10,000 is not enough," he reasoned out.

Badbad also helped his wife Nolbad in giving birth to all their three children—Luming, Sabel and Efren. The names sound good, he said.

He learned to assist from what he had seen from his wife. "It took long, the whole night."

Keeping the company of a woman giving birth, he said he deeply understood the pain she was going through.

Kneeling position

"The best position for a woman giving birth is kneeling," said Badbad. It can also be in a sitting or lying down position. "But the child comes easier when the mother is kneeling," he emphasized.

In a kneeling position, he claimed, the baby goes out of the mother's womb straight down on a native mat. Once out, the baby would be washed with water from the wellspring. The umbilical cord is cut off with a sharp piece of wood from a tree or a bolo-like instrument. But before using it, the instrument must be sterilized by exposing it to fire.

Badbad claimed that a Mangyan mother, after giving birth, could immediately get up and be back to her daily routine. But he prefers to take care of his wife by doing her household tasks.

BADBAD Mangday cuts grass for one of his friend's house. MADONNA T. VIROLA

He prepares hot soup for her. "She's a pity," he said.

Dangerous

Badbad admitted that assisting in child birthing could be dangerous. "Others don't know how to assist, that's why the child dies."

Not following traditions can also bring bad luck, he said.

Badbad said the Mangyan people did not celebrate birthdays before, but some had learned to do so. "They now also buy noodles from the town, which they cook and serve to guests. Or they serve pork and chicken, if there are."

"When I was small, there were no birthdays," he said. He did not know why but surmised that the reasons could be that the Mangyan folk are poor.

Mountain life

Badbad Mangday lives in a mountain in a place called Naguba in Mansalay. He does not know whether it is a sitio or a barangay, but it takes six hours of walk downhill to reach the town proper. "If I leave at 9 a.m., I will arrive at the town at about 3 p.m., if I don't have any baggage."

Asked why he stayed there, he said there was no other place to live in. The community has about six houses.

Badbad's life is devoted to planting and he considers this to be his special skill. "[There's] no hunger provided you work hard."

A transistor radio is their window to the world. He came to learn about this writer through a radio program, "Alingawngaw ng Buhay."

From this southern part of Mindoro, Badbad pays P135 to get to Calapan. Sometimes, it's P120 or as low as P100 during Christmas and New Year when Badbad would ask for a discount.

Gift of friendship

Every year, he never fails to visit his friends—Bella Magluyan in Barangay Lazareto, Ditas Anorico in Barangay Suqui, Fely Sevilla in Barangay Camilmil, and Inday Ron in Barangay San Antonio, among others.

He came to know them when his daughter Luming got operated on for goiter.

Magluyan was the staff in the Oriental Mindoro Provincial Hospital who gave him food, told him where the washroom was, and other things.

Sevilla introduced him to Anorico, who is the provincial nutritionist-dietitian. Ron is the godmother of another friend named Gerry, whom Badbad met in Pinamalayan town.

Badbad never failed to show these people his gratitude and thoughtfulness. He remembered helping Gerry carry an oxygen tank for his father in Camilmil.

Another friend whom he called Allan once asked him to make a bracelet for him.

"I'm' good when one is good to me," he said. In the course of his friendship, he has drawn more friends as Tagalogs find him to be a person of self-respect, sincerity and responsibility.

When things go wrong, he'd say: "That's life."

Badbad's goodness

His youngest child, Efren, 19, goes to Grade 2 in Cabuyao 10 with 35 other Mangyan students.

"It's hard if you do not know how to count, you'll be fooled in business," said Efren. What is sold at P10 per kilo in town is bought only at half the price, he explained.

Badbad would try to learn from Efren how to read simple materials. "It's hard if one does not know how to read," he said. He would attend parents' meetings in the mountains.

To feel secure from some Tagalogs whom he calls "*loko*" (bad), he would keep his bolo with him.

Asked how he feels when people fool him, he said: "It's okey, as long as I am not the one who fools others."

Badbad's only dream for Efren is to be like him—"hardworking and good."

As he left the city, he promised to return to visit his friends. "I don't beg. It's shameful. It's different if you beg. But if they voluntary give, accept it."

When somebody gives him anything, he makes sure it is voluntary. "Even if you don't ask something from a person, if he has, he will give you," Badbad said.

That's why people would kid him by calling him "Gudgud."

FOUR DIGIT
8 1 8 5
(In exact order)
SUERTRES
7 8 1

METRO
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MEGALOTTO 6/45
2 5 10 13 16 29

Army brigade to build shelters for Manila fire victims

By Juliet Labog-Javellana and Tarra Quismundo

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo has ordered the construction of 2,500 temporary shelters for some of the victims of the huge fire that devastated the Baseco compound in Port Area, Manila.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman and Housing Secretary Mike Defensor said that the 51st Engineering Brigade Philippine Army has been tasked to build the shelters in coordination with the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council. A non-government organization has donated quick-drying cement.

Soliman said families with small children would be given priority in the settlement. She said there were 5,003 families, or about 25,000 people, who lost their houses in the fire.

She said a third of the number of victims are children aged one to three years old.

But she said only 2,500 structures were destroyed, which shows that the 25,000 people were crammed in these structures either as owners, sharers or renters.

As Soliman appealed for more donations of food, milk, water, dry clothes and diapers, Manila health workers and educators have been making the rounds of the nine evacuation centers tending to the victims.

The Manila Health Department has channeled much of its resources and manpower to Baseco, which has been declared a calamity area.

MHD Planning and Coordination Chief Carmencita Solis said that the health department has also been working to prevent the outbreak of diseases in the evacuation centers.

"There are health workers, including physicians, nurses, and educators, who go around evacuation centers everyday to advise people to boil their water and keep their surroundings clean," said Solis.

Since the Monday blaze—the worst fire to hit Baseco to date—power has been out in the compound, and water supply has been lacking in most of the area because of low water pressure.

Thus, the people have resorted to cutting water lines to get their water supply.

Solis said that they have been taking samples from eight points in the area and learned that the water is free of contaminants.

Water firms have been tapped to supply potable water to the fire victims. Solis said that four water tanks have been supplying the residents since Monday.

Aid drive launched for victims

THE DEPARTMENT of Social Welfare and Development and the Philippine Daily Inquirer have come up with a way for you to help the victims of the fire that razed the Baseco Compound in Port Area, Manila last Monday.

"Bayanihang Baseco," a two-week emergency relief campaign yesterday was launched to seek aid for some 25,000 fire victims.

Aid workers said that their number one concern right now is for the victims to have something to eat and drink, and have something to sleep on at night.

Rice, noodles, bottled water, canned goods and milk for babies may be sent through Teresita Lumactod, chair of Barangay 649, Bagong Lupa, Baseco Compound. You may call her at (0917) 631-0053 or 404-1047.

Aid in bulk may be sent to the DSWD National Capital Region office on San Rafael corner Legarda streets, Sampaloc, Manila. You can also call DSWD NCR Director Alice Bala at 734-8647 to 49.

Donors may also send aid to the Social Welfare office at the Manila City Hall. *Tarra Quismundo*

Marquez blames Golez for woes

By Armand Nocum and TJ Burgonio

WHEN it rains, it pours. And Parañaque Mayor Joey Marquez appears to be looking for someone to catch some of the bad press.

Marquez on Tuesday accused the Office of the Ombudsman of playing politics after the graft body decided to include him in the list of 10 officials subjected to a lifestyle check.

In a press statement, the third-term mayor said the investigation could be the handiwork of former National Security Adviser Roilo Golez, who will also be seeking the congressional seat for Parañaque's second district.

Marquez dismissed the Ombudsman investigation as a "desperate move on the part of (Golez)," who is running as an independent.

He also described the string of graft cases filed against him before the Sandiganbayan as "resurrected" issues.

Earlier, Assistant Ombudsman Ernesto Nocos revealed that Marquez was among the public officials being investigated for alleged graft and dishonesty in public office.

Nocos said the 10 officials under investigation included a governor in Luzon, "at least one regional director" and "three to four district" engineers of the Department of Public Works and Highways.

Last week, Marquez and eight others were indicted before the Sandiganbayan for the purchase of the Parañaque City government of allegedly overpriced broom from January 1996 to September 1997.

Marquez and his co-respondents are accused of overpricing 128,842 pieces of *walis-tinting*, which cost P11 each, by P4 to P14.

The Commission on Audit had ruled that the purchase was "grossly overpriced." It also noted that the purchase was done without compliance to auditing rules.

Marquez is facing two other graft charges before the Sandiganbayan: the alleged overprice in the purchase of P3.2-million ammunition for his close-in bodyguards; and the failure of Marquez to reimburse P6.4 million worth of textbooks ordered by the Parañaque government from a supplier.

Reacting to Marquez's accusation, Golez yesterday brushed off the mayor's insinuations.

"His lifestyle is public knowledge and I don't need to contribute to what is publicly known," he said.

Contrary to his claims, Marquez "is the one in a desperate situation because his cases are piling up and he has no one to blame but himself," Golez said.

Golez noted that his opponent was facing 14 cases before the Sandiganbayan.

"I suggest he prepare for his trials," he added.

Golez also noted that Marquez was in a bad situation because he was lagging behind in surveys and had "weak support" from residents because of the "issue of morality and decency" against him.

For his part, Nocos assured the mayor that politics had nothing to do with the lifestyle investigation.

He pointed out that the graft charges have been filed against Marquez long before he announced his running for Congress against Golez. The same is true with the lifestyle check.

"Although we respect his views, we advice him to just concentrate on dealing with the graft cases at hand, rather than attack the integrity of our office," he said.

THE RIGHT FEEL
Members of Makati City Fire and Rescue units put on a show for shoppers at the Greenbelt 3 Park, simulating a mock response to a bomb blast. Drill organizers spared nothing in terms of detail—bloodied victims, blast debris and even a raging fire—to give this scale of devastation the right feel.

PHOTOS BY ERIK ARAZAS

U-turn slots on Buendia

THE METROPOLITAN Manila Development Authority yesterday opened up Buendia Avenue in Makati City to the clearway scheme, closing the intersections and carving out U-turn slots along the median of the vital stretch.

Under the scheme, all the intersections along Buendia, from N. Domingo Street to Roxas Boulevard, will be closed and motorists will be directed to use the U-turn slots.

But according to Joey Salgado of the Makati City information and corporate relations department, the MMDA's simple traffic solutions—like the clearway scheme—are not enough to solve the city's traffic woes.

Salgado said that with a city population of 471,379, which swells to 1.2 to 1.4 million during the daytime, they expect that the measure would not be enough to cope with the "huge number of vehicles" clogging up Makati's streets.

Salgado said that the city government is now looking into the possibility of constructing an intracity mass transport system, which would connect the Central Business District to the city's farthest communities. *Margaux Ortiz*

Inefficient probe, efficient cover-up

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

THE CENTRAL Police District could hold the record of having the most inefficient investigators. CPD has jurisdiction over the whole of Quezon City.

Why does this writer make such an accusation?

Investigation reports should be detailed and complete. There are no ifs, ands or buts about them. No matter who's involved, a police investigator should leave no stone unturned in a criminal case.

A case in point is the reported suicide of Alexander Robert "A.R." Santiago, son of ex-Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago and former Local Government Undersecretary Narciso "Jun" Santiago.

The CPD report on the alleged suicide was sketchy. The investigators relied solely on the statements of the victim's relatives. They should have conducted an inquiry based on the statements they had gathered.

In short, the investigators were not thorough in their work.

Here's what Supt. Procopio Gonzales Lipana, chief of the CPD criminal investigation unit, had to say on the investigation report of his men:

"Initial query made on the relatives of the victim, who rushed him to the hospital, tends to show that the latter committed suicide. In the absence of proof to the contrary, the investigation is delving on the suicide angle of the case. Nevertheless, the probe will dig into other angles/matters and circumstances surrounding the incident."

But there has been no further report on the "other angles/matters and circumstances" surrounding the death of A.R. Santiago.

The findings in a case such as A.R.'s should be complete and thorough. Why is there no medico legal report on the supposed suicide? A medicolegal report would have dealt with what type of gun was used, where the bullet entered and exited, the gunpowder burns—if any—on the victim's hands and head (because of the proximity of the gun to the head during the blast), etc.

There was no autopsy conducted on the victim's body. An autopsy is an examination of the body to determine the cause of death.

Since A.R.'s was a police case (all violent deaths, including suicide, are police cases), investigators should have insisted that the victim's body be autopsied. No matter how highly placed in society the victim or his relatives are, the body should be autopsied.

* * *

I would like to stress here that I am not making any accusation against anybody on A.R.'s death. I have the highest respect for Miriam and Jun, who are both my friends.

I am just saying that the police should be thorough in handling investigations of violent deaths. Without exception.

Somebody pointed out to me that the Central Police District only made a perfunctory probe of the young Santiago's death.

* * *

The CPD may be inefficient in investigating violent deaths, but it's very efficient in trying to cover up the wrongdoings of its members.

My public service program, "Isumbong mo kay Tulfo," was given the runaround on a robbery case involving three members of a CPD patrol unit. The victim here is Dennis Sobrepena, a computer programmer of a Makati firm.

Sobrepena said that PO3 Elpidio Jamito, PO3 Randy Danga-ap and PO2 Jose Alvarez flagged him down on a charge that he was seen playing with himself inside his car.

Sobrepena had parked his car on the shoulder of the road to answer a call on his cellular phone (A Metro Manila ordinance forbids driving and using your cell phone at the same time). He was about to start his car again when the three cops came and accused him of an indecent act inside his car.

Sobrepena said he denied the cops' accusation, but they arrested him anyway.

The cops released Sobrepena only after they were able to extort P400 from him. He said the cops had asked whether he had an automated teller machine card with him, but he was able to hide it. The policemen dug into his wallet.

My "Isumbong" staff tried to arrange a confrontation between Sobrepena and the cops. Their superior, Chief Insp.Romeo Birog, would not bring them out. Birog told my staff Sobrepena should just file a criminal case in court against his men.

Ogad! Kailan pa kaya titino ang ating mga pulis?

Separate detention facilities for women, children sought

THE COMMISSION on Human Rights has issued a resolution calling for the establishment of separate detention facilities for women and children.

The resolution cited specific provisions based on international standards and domestic legislations, and the apparent failure to protect and promote the rights of children in conflict with the law.

The CHR said that until now, suitable detention centers for children, separate from adults convicted of crimes, have not yet been provided.

The agency also recommended to social welfare, justice and interior local government officials, to improve the conditions in children and women's facilities. *Tina Santos*

Demoralization hits WPD unit over shake-up

By Leila Salaverria

MEMBERS of the Homicide Section of the Western Police District are reportedly demoralized over a reshuffle that they expect would cripple their office.

SP02 Virgo Villareal said his and five other investigators' transfer to the Follow Up Unit, which conducts stakeouts and arrests of suspects, has virtually left the Homicide Section standing on one leg, especially at night when the bulk of cases are reported.

Villareal then accused Supt. Co Yee Co, head of the WPD Criminal Investigation and Detection Unit, of abuse of authority and of using the reshuffle as a form of retaliation.

He explained that he and Co earlier had a misunderstanding over his wearing shorts to work and sporting a mustache.

Co also allegedly blamed Villareal for initiating a petition to oust the CIDU chief.

But Co dismissed Villareal's claims, saying the reorganization was meant to strengthen the follow-up unit and reduce the backlog of unsolved cases at the homicide section.

"I just want to put the right men in the right jobs," he said, adding that without operatives at the follow-up unit, there would be no one to run after crime suspects.

He added that the transfer of several homicide investigators had been done after consultation with their superiors.

METROBRIEFS

5 charged for slay

THREE brothers and two men who allegedly attacked a family of five, killing one, last week have been charged with murder and frustrated murder before the Manila Prosecutor's Office. Charged were Renacido brothers Jonel, Ryan and Roberto, and Belarmino Mirano and Christopher Yacob, a billiard hall helper. They were accused of killing electrician Angelito Oquino, 32, and stabbing his father, Danilo, 52, a barangay tanod, and brother Deo, 19, and wounding sister Irene Oquino Ramos and her husband, Dionisio. The incident happened along Martinez Street in Sta. Ana on Jan. 10.
Leila Salaverria

Street gang busted

FOR ALLEGEDLY attempting to kill a barangay watchman and taking a 13-year-old boy as hostage, five alleged members of a street gang were arrested in Caloocan City. Arrested were Roberto Advincula, 44, Renante Señal, 27, Richard Pinto, 24, Willie Navarro, 37, and Ricardo Pinto, 21. Their alleged cohort, Jonel Gonzaga, managed to flee, a report from the Caloocan City Police said yesterday. Police also confiscated a .38-caliber handgun and three homemade shotguns from the suspects. At about 10 p.m. Monday, the suspects barged into the house of barangay watchman Rizaldy Alemene in Phase 6B Package 3, Bagong Silang, Caloocan City. The six allegedly wanted to kill Almene, whom they suspected of providing information to the police about their activities. Almene was not there so they instead ganged up on Almene's 13-year-old son and took the boy hostage. ***Edson Tandoc Jr.***

Pasay City fire

A FIRE destroyed P5 million worth of property in a residential area in Pasay City Tuesday. The fire razed 25 houses and seven commercial establishments on Kalayaan Street, Merville Subdivision. According to FO3 Pedro San Miguel, the fire began at the second floor of homeowner Francisca David's house at 2:32 p.m. The fire was put out five hours later. There were no casualties in the incident. San Miguel said they have yet to investigate the cause of the fire. ***Margaux Ortiz***

OLPS reunion

BATCH 1983 of Our Lady of Peace School Antipolo City will have their grand reunion on Jan. 18 dubbed "Kita-Kits after 20 years." There will be a motorcade, which will start at the Ynares Sports Center, followed by a Mass and program at 4 p.m. at the Deogracias Resort, Simeon Rd. Grand Heights Subd. Antipolo City (before Tiptop). For details, e-mail Olpsians1983@yahoogroups.com or text Ruby at 0917-8164243; Lyndon at 0917-8100621, Natty at 0917-5263773 and Ronnie at 0917-3870614.

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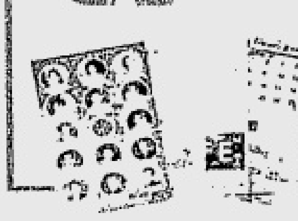
*CLOTRASONE CR 5G	247.25	227.50
*CLOTRASONE OINT 5G	247.25	227.50



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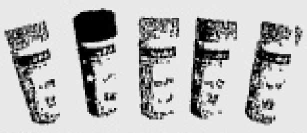

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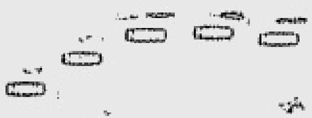

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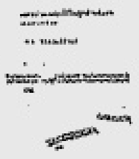

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SPORTS

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FERRER (right) lands a left to the body of Pujiono during their lightweight bout Tuesday night.

ROMY HOMILLADA

Ferrer, Camat prevail

Joven also reaches Asian slugfest q'finals

By Roy Luarca

PUERTO PRINCESA City, Palawan—Lightweight Florencio Ferrer and middleweight Christopher Camat were clear winners, but light welterweight Francis Joven barely squeezed through to the quarterfinals of the 22nd Asian Boxing Championships here Tuesday night.

Throwing crisp, rapid punches, Ferrer routed Indonesia's Yoshia Pujiono, 33-11, while Camat found his range in the second round to whip India's Farminder, 20-10, at the Puerto Princesa Coliseum.

In contrast, Joven allowed Iraq's Zuhair Khudhair to draw level in the last five seconds (22-22) before advancing when the judges' individual scores favored him, 78-74.

Counting the abbreviated victories of light fly Harry Tañamor and flyweight Violito Payla, the Filipinos won five of their six assignments for the day. The only casualty was bantam Arlan Lerio, who narrowly lost to Kazakhstan's Assanov Almuz, 20-19.

Also in contention for Olympic berths are inaugural victors welterweight Romeo Brin and featherweight Junard Ladon.

The 30-year-old Brin, plucked out of a one-year retirement as last-minute substitute for an ailing Mark Jason Melligen, was scheduled against Kazakhstan's Kazymzhanov Nursa, while Ladon was to face Tajikistan's Kasanov Salom at presstime Wednesday night.

If Brin, gold medalist in the 1999 Brunei Southeast Asian Games, wins, he'd be assured of a bronze medal while closing in on his third straight Olympic stint after the 1996 Atlanta and 2000 Sydney Games.

Ladon, on the other hand, needs to beat Salom and yet another foe to make it to the semifinals.

The 20-year-old Ferrer, a 2000 Budapest

FERRER/ A21

Pacquiao is best featherweight

By Salven Lagumbay,
Contributor

MANNY Pacquiao is now the best featherweight boxer in the planet.

The conqueror of Mexican legend Marco Antonio Barrera has been given that lofty rating by the prestigious The Ring Magazine in its latest pound-for-pound rankings released yesterday.

Considered the bible of pro boxing, The Ring Magazine rankings are considered the best and most objective compilation of the real status of boxers and its ratings are deemed more authoritative than the ones released by the WBC, WBA and IBF.

The latest rankings also installed the General Santos City-based Pacquiao, the reigning IBF superbantam champion, as No. 6 in the mythical pound-for-pound list.

Barrera, whom Pacquiao stopped in the 11th round of their non-title featherweight duel last November, is now officially out of the pound-for-pound roster.

As king of the featherweights, Pacquiao's chief challenger now is WBA/IBF champ Juan Manuel Marquez with Barrera ranked as No. 2.

Pacquiao, the first Filipino to barge into

PACQUIAO/ A21

Still no taker for John Arigo; BCAP protests

ARIGO

By June Navarro

IT SEEMS John Arigo has a low market value in the pro league.

Despite his sterling performance for Alaska the past three seasons, the 6-foot-3 swingman couldn't land a team almost a week after turning down the Aces' maximum salary offer.

"John (Arigo) definitely wants out of Alaska and be traded to another team. But nobody's biting for one reason or the other," said an INQUIRER source.

The Aces had dangled a three-year, P12.6-million contract renewal to Arigo but the Filipino-American cager said he'd like to find out first if there's a team in dire need of his services.

Arigo's frantic search yielded no taker.

The same source said Arigo had approached San Miguel Beer, Talk 'N Text, Purefoods and Barangay Ginebra, but they were not interested.

"I don't want to take a shot at the guy but he (Arigo) has an attitude problem," said another source who requested anonymity.

It will be recalled that Arigo had a spat with Alaska coach Tim Cone during the Aces' championship debacle against Coca-Cola in the 2002 All-Filipino Cup.

In another development, the Basketball Coaches Association of the Philippines yesterday filed a protest with the Department of Labor to stop Shell from hiring American coach John Moran.

Shell team manager Bobby Kanapi and BCAP president Chito Narvasa try to settle the Moran issue when they meet today to discuss the criteria for the hiring of foreign coaches.

SPORTS TV

Compiled by L. Manguiat

BASKETBALL: NBA—Timberwolves vs Spurs; 9:30 a.m. (r-10 p.m.); Solar Sports; Sixers vs Mavs; 7 p.m.; IBC 13 — It's KG against Tim Duncan as Minnesota tangles with San Antonio while Philadelphia faces Dallas.

NBA Greatest Games—Bucks vs Sixers, Game 7, 1981 Eastern Semifinals; 12 noon; Solar Sports— Rewind and see if Milwaukee or Philadelphia comes out on top in this do-or-die encounter.

TENNIS: Davis Cup Finals; 2 p.m.; Solar Sports—It's men's doubles action between Australia and Spain.

Hopman Cup; 10:30 p.m. (r); Star Sports—It's not the cold war, but the Americans and Russians go at it on the tennis court in Australia.

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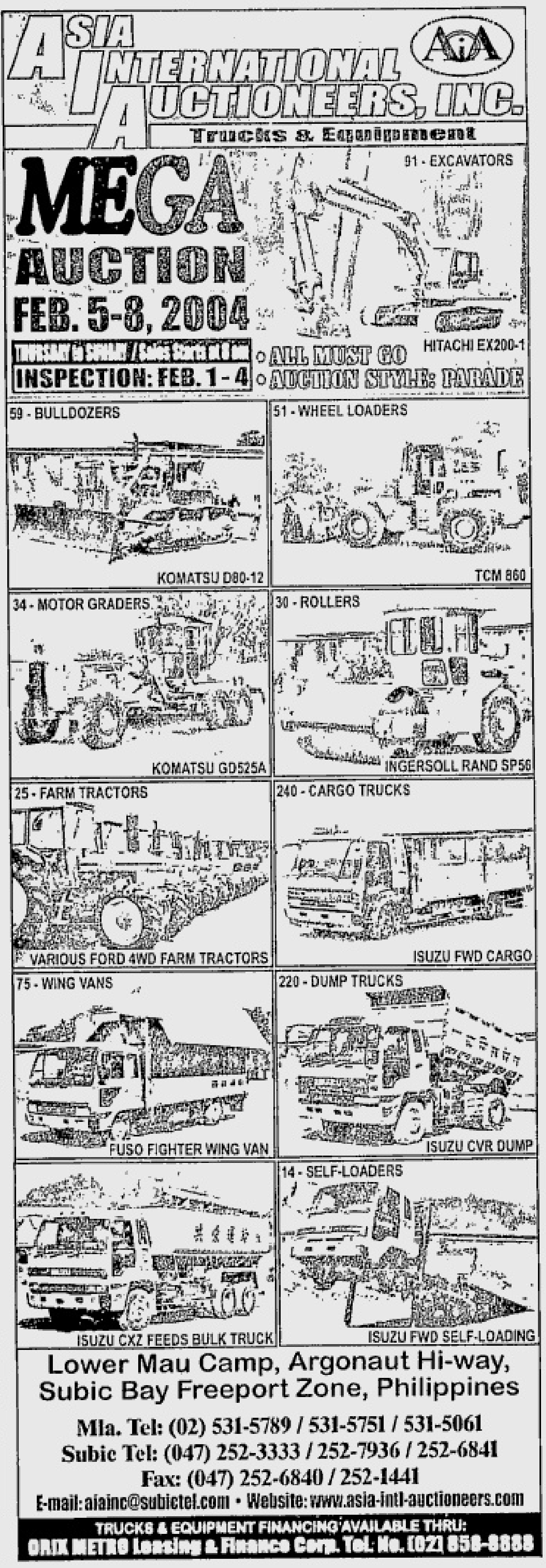

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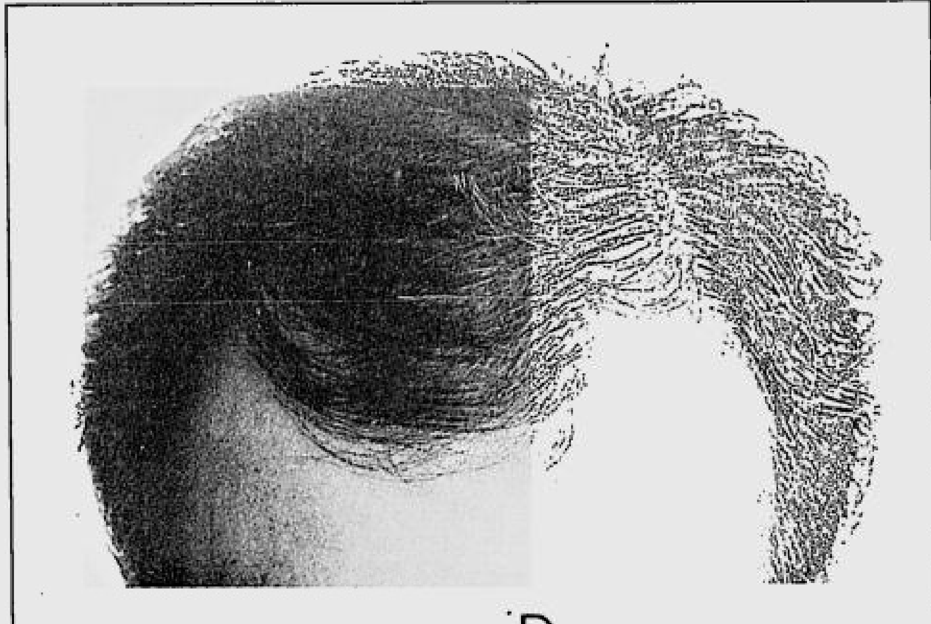

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RP keglers open bid in Asian Tour

GRANGER

By Marc Anthony Reyes

SINGAPORE—Bannered by defending champion Purvis Granger and World FIQ gold medalists Cecilia Yap and Liza del Rosario, the Philippines starts its campaign for overall supremacy in the region when the Aviva Asian Bowling Tour grand slam finals begins today.

Granger, an American who served as consultant of the RP Asian Games team two years ago, will attempt to become the first back-to-back champion in this tournament which pits the top 16 men's and women's players in Asia.

Yap and Del Rosario, who together with Liza Clutario won the world trios championship last year in Malaysia, are also rated highly in the four-day event.

Granger, 39, is ready to rumble following an impressive showing early in the season. He finished third in the initial leg in Indonesia, second in Thailand in May before taking third place in the third leg in Manila last June. His consistency earned him $8,500 and 196 ranking points.

Yap and Del Rosario are currently ranked tied for third in the women's tour with 171 points each. Yap finished runner-up twice and third once.

Granger is expected to face stiff opposition from newly crowned Hong Kong international open champion Wu Siu Hong. The 19-year-old Wu ruled the Indonesia leg and finished third in the Hong Kong edition.

In the women's side, four-time Asia Bowler of the Year Shalin Zulkifli of Malaysia will again be the force to reckon with. The defending Grand Slam champion won the Philippines and Malaysian legs this season.

Also seeing action for the Philippines is Paulo Valdez, ranked 11th in the Tour with 93 points. Valdez topped the Malaysian edition this season.

Red-hot Pistons tame Bulls, tally 9th straight win

CHICAGO—Richard Hamilton scored 24 points and Ben Wallace added 12 points and 17 rebounds to power the red-hot Detroit Pistons to their ninth straight victory, a 105-89 decision over the Chicago Bulls Tuesday.

The winning streak is the longest for the Pistons since they landed 11 in a row in 1990-91.

The Bulls closed to within five points in the fourth quarter but a 22-7 run helped the Pistons pull away.

Chucky Atkins came off the bench to make three three-pointers during Detroit's fourth-quarter run, his only points of the game. Chauncey Billups added 17 points and seven assists for the Pistons.

Kirk Hinrich led the Bulls with 19 points and 12 assists but they still lost for the third time in four games.

Scottie Pippen returned to the Chicago line-up after a knee injury had kept him out for a month.

He received a prolonged cheer from the hometown crowd when he entered the game in the first quarter but he failed to provide any spark.

Pippen played 12 minutes and did not score, going 0-for-4 with three assists.

In New Orleans, Kevin Garnett scored 22 points and pulled in 14 rebounds to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 94-89 win over the Hornets.

Latrell Sprewell poured in 26 points and Sam Cassell contributed 24 as Minnesota captured its fourth straight victory.

Baron Davis had 22 points for the Hornets, who jumped into a 30-18 lead in the first quarter.

In Milwaukee, Michael Redd tossed in 20 points for the Bucks in a 111-103 triumph over the Boston Celtics.

Toni Kukoc scored 16 points and Erick Strickland pitched in with 14 for the Bucks, who have won six of seven games.

Ricky Davis piled up 33 points for the Celtics and Mark Blount added 12 points and 13 rebounds.

In Salt Lake City, Andrei Kirilenko notched 10 points and 10 rebounds to help the Utah Jazz to an easy 97-80 victory over the Golden State Warriors.

Carlos Arroyo drained a team-high 19 points and Raja Bell 15 to give the Jazz their second straight win.

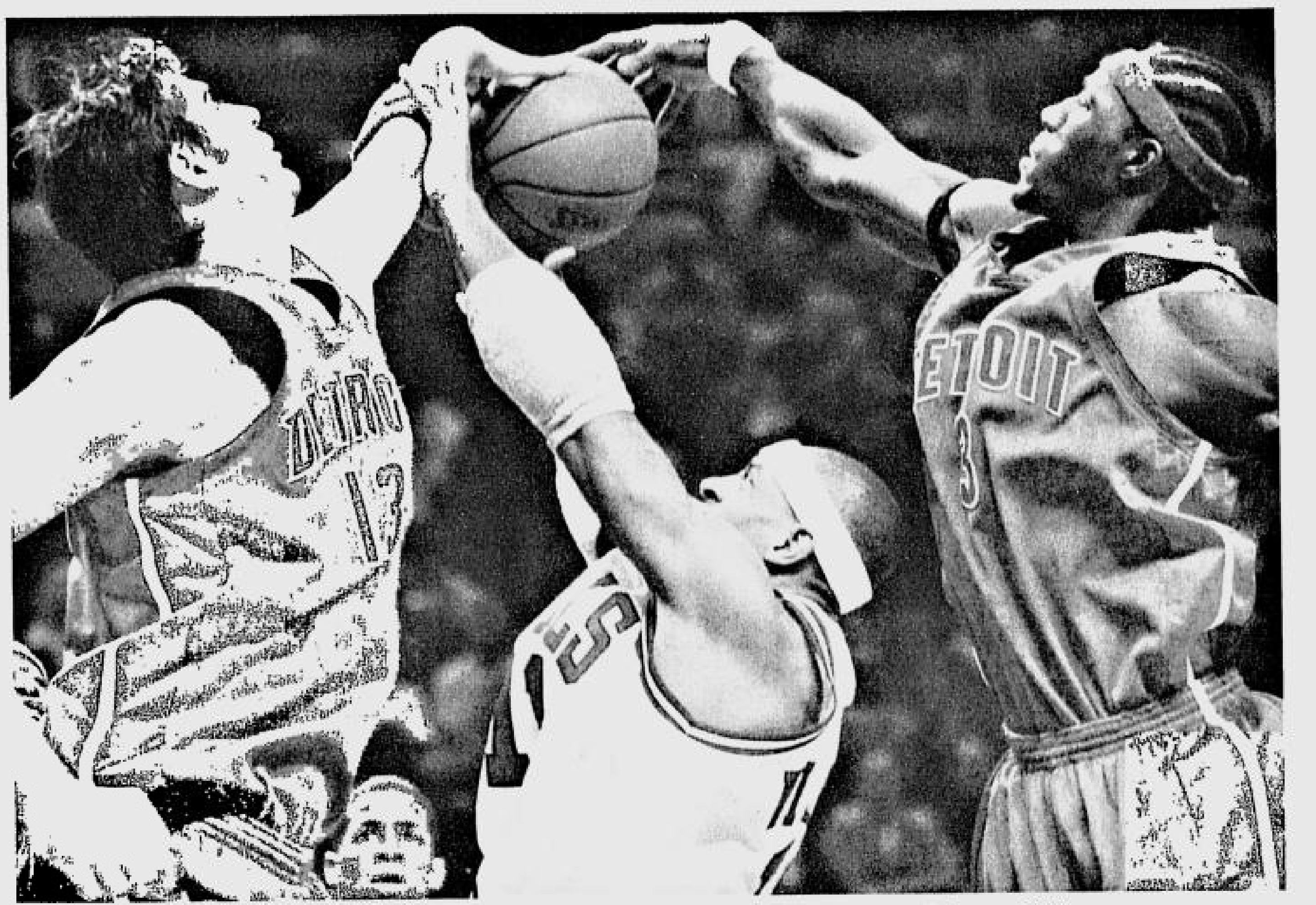
Clifford Robinson scored 23 points and Brian Cardinal added 14 points and 11 rebounds for the slumping Warriors, who have lost nine of their last 10 games.

In Atlanta, Shareef Abdur-Rahim picked up 29 points and 10 rebounds as the Hawks upset the San Antonio Spurs 86-77.

Jason Terry put up 18 points and Stephen Jackson 16 to help the Hawks end a three-game losing skid.

Tim Duncan had 28 points for the Spurs, who lost for the first time in five games. *Reuters*

Complete results:
Houston 93, Washington 80; Atlanta 86, San Antonio 77; Minnesota 94, New Orleans 89, Milwaukee 111, Boston 103; Detroit 105, Chicago 89. Denver 105, Phoenix 92, Utah 97, Golden State 80. Sacramento 90, Miami 86; Cleveland 104, Seattle 96; LA Clippers 103, Portland 96. *AP*



DETROIT Pistons' center Mehmet Okur (left) and forward Ben Wallace foil an attempt by Chicago Bulls' Jerome Williams. REUTERS

Bryant out for 5 games

EL SEGUNDO, California—Kobe Bryant is expected to miss at least five games and could be sidelined for several weeks with a sprained right shoulder.

The Los Angeles Lakers' star was injured when he was fouled by Kedrick Brown late in the first quarter of a 89-79 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers on Monday.

Lakers coach Phil Jackson said Tuesday that Bryant won't need surgery but probably will go on the injured list. Bryant had an MRI exam Tuesday morning, and the results were not as bad as feared. *AP*

Welcoat, Fash seek 2nd s'final victory

DEFENDING champion Welcoat Paints and Fash Liquid Detergent try to live up to their pre-tournament hype as the teams likely to clash in the finals when they go for their second straight wins today in the semifinals of the PBL Platinum Cup at the Pasig Sports Center.

STANDINGS	W	L
Welcoat	10	3
Sunkist-UST	8	5
Fash Liquid	8	5
Blustar	7	6

GAMES TODAY (Pasig Sports Center)
1:30 p.m. — Fash Liquid vs Blustar
3:30 p.m. —Welcoat vs Sunkist-UST

Still basking in the glow of their stirring 90-84 come-from-behind win over Blu Star Detergent, the Paint Masters seek sweet revenge over Sunkist-UST at 3:30 p.m.

The Liquid Power, the last team to make it to the semifinals, collide earlier at 1:30 p.m. with the Detergent Kings.

Just like the Paint Masters, the Liquid Power also served notice of their burning desire to make it to the finals for the third straight time when they overwhelmed the Tigers last Tuesday, 82-72.

The win enabled Fash to catch up with its victim at second with similar 8-5 win-loss records behind the 10-3 mark of Welcoat.

Jojo Tangkay is again expected to steal the limelight from his celebrated teammates, among them James Yap, Ervin Sotto, Marc Pingris and Paul Artadi, following his awe-inspiring performance the last time out where he almost singlehandedly lifted the Paint Masters out of a 25-point hole.

The 6-foot-1 Cebuano exploded for 40 points, establishing a new league record of 37 points in the final half and matching the most points in a quarter by hitting 20 in the third period.

SPORTSWATCH

Joma Gamboa hangs up gloves

JOMA Gamboa has decided to hang up his gloves for good. But Japanese manager Joe Koizumi said Gamboa, who was knocked out in the second round by World Boxing Council flyweight champion Jorge "Travieso" Arce in their title fight in Mexico Saturday, would remain in the sport as a trainer. The Bacolod City puncher, the first minimumweight Filipino champion in the World Boxing Association (WBA) and the third Filipino in history to capture a world title in the 105-lb division, will serve as chief assistant of his long-time trainer Juanito Ablaca, who trains several up-and-coming Filipino prospects from Cebu. *Rey Danseco, contributor*

Roligon's 'Classical Derby' today

THE "CLASSICAL 4-Cock Derby" gets under way at Roligon Mega Cockpit today with at least 60 exciting fights on tap. Host is veteran cocker-breeder Pol Garde of Cagayan de Oro who will be assisted by pit manager Roming Vergara. Seeing action are prominent cockers and breeders of Rizal, Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Bulacan, Negros Occidental, Cagayan de Oro and Metro Manila. A bonus of P1,000 will go to all the first fight winners, according to Garde. Another event, slated next Thursday, Jan. 22, is the "Otso-Otso 4-Cock Derby," to be hosted by lawyer Rey Bagatsing. The fastest kill champion will get P20,000 while the slowest kill winner (based on third fight) gets P10,000. For other inquiries, please call 833-2275 and 833-1638.

Entries gird for World Slasher tilt

FOREIGN and local participants gird for the much-awaited World Slasher Cup 8-Cock International Derby this coming Monday, Wednesday and Friday (Jan. 19, 21 and 23) at the Araneta Coliseum. Big Dome owner Jorge "Nene" Araneta, Gov. Ito Ynares and Firefly Group, derby hosts, have assembled a powerhouse lineup of veteran cockfighting luminaries to see action in this prestigious event known as the "Olympics of cockfighting." The foreigners will be bannered by 11 Americans who will be presented in a press conference on Saturday, 12 noon at the Araneta green gate. They are Roger Roberts, Johnny Moore, the legendary Ray Alexander of Alabama, CD Moore, Hector Hernandez, Wilbert Lee Blanc, Richard Harris, Bobby Fairchild, Jimmy Cody, Jerry Douglas and Sam Caudle Jr. William Go of Rizal (Gold Cup Jed and Joy), Laguna sportsman Pol Estrellado (Jade LCC) and Rep. Claude Bautista of Davao (R and B Farm Binangonan) are the defending champions.

Ex-England goalkeeper retires

LONDON—Age, injury and blunders finally caught up with David Seaman. After a career spanning three decades and more than 1,000 matches, the former England goalkeeper announced Tuesday he was quitting the game at the age of 40. Seaman, whose international career ended last year, quit halfway through the season with Manchester City after failing to overcome a nagging shoulder injury. David James transferred from first division West Ham the same day to take Seaman's place. James had also taken over as England's No. 1 goalkeeper. *AP*

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BADMINTON DUO
Pioneer Badminton's explosive tandem of Randy Kanapi (left) and Edmin Tarriela (right) in action during the Pioneer Badminton Xmas tournament last month. Pioneer Badminton has lined up at least three tournaments this year and is accepting new members. Interested parties may call 746-0828 or 638-5343.

The other PSA Awards

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

SEVERAL decades back, there was this annual PSA Awards I had recently unearthed. PSA here stood for Panggalatok Sports Association. It came much ahead of the current PSA (Philippine Sportswriters Association) Awards, the bash that recently honored boxer Manny Pacquiao and bowler CJ Suarez as Co-Athletes of the Year.

The PSA Awards I'm talking about also honored athletes who had scored outstanding achievements during the year. But unlike the current PSA Awards, which had the President of the Philippines as its guest of honor and speaker yearly, the old PSA Awards had the governor of Pangasinan as its yearly celebrity guest.

The PSA Awards of Pangasinan was always a smashing success, what with its honorees-from the "dama" champion to the "tumbang preso" champion-deserving their awards. Even the "kalit" champion, the "guenggueng" champion and the "balubalan" champion were duly acknowledged.

For 199 years, the affair never suffered a major glitch—until it held its 200th year awards. The governor of Pangasinan snubbed the affair, sending her son to represent her.

The governor's name was Aga Simmabi. I had initially thought the second "m" was a letter "n" but after talking to some senior citizens from Tococ in Mangatarem, Domalandan in Lingayen, Banawang and Buenlag in Mangaldan, and Salomague in Aguilar, I was convinced the governor's family name had two "Ms." Next, I found out that Aga in Pangasinan is a she as opposed to Aga Muhlach, the popular actor who is a he.

"Aga Simmabi was the smallest ever to become governor of Pangasinan," an old timer told me. "She was only 4-feet-4. Yes, she was small, but she was terrible."

Gov. Aga Simmabi was so terrible she ordered her son, Dagot, to go to the PSA Awards on foot.

Prior to the PSA Awards, she got miffed over a news item that said athletes were unsure of voting for her come election simply because they thought she had not done enough for sports during her term. The afternoon of the PSA Awards, to further spite the sportswriters, she gave a surprise visit to the devotees of the Christ The King procession in Bugallon, Pangasinan.

She paid dearly for her snub of the PSA Awards. She lost in the elections, bowing to a guy named Anggapo So Taloto. It was called the upset of the century, since Anggapo So Taloto was a no-read, no-write guy. Back in those days, anybody could run for public office for as long as one was not deaf, nor mute.

That's because what mattered back then was that a candidate knew how to speak because voters loved to hear him/her expound on his/her platform during a campaign sortie, a much-awaited event in those laid-back days when radio and TV weren't around yet.

Also back then, a candidate must know how to listen because voters loved to grill their candidates during every *miting de avance*.

Never mind if the candidate could neither read nor write. Voters then believed that a good candidate could always have someone to write for him/her, read for him/her, even decide for him/her if the situation warranted it.

That's why one reason Aga Simmabi lost to Anggapo So Taloto was because Dagot, the governor's son, did not speak at the PSA Awards on behalf of his mother during the PSA Awards. But he was not to blame, though. Dagot, because he walked to the Asia Inn Hotel in Dagupan City from Binmaley (a good 20-km walk, maybe), had to actually leave in a huff minutes after arriving to seek medical attention. Because he walked barefooted, the soles of his feet were bleeding excessively from blisters and wounds.

But that was not what really did Aga Simmabi in. It was that Anggapo So Taloto had a shorter nickname than Aga Simmabi. While Simmabi's alias was already a short Aga, Taloto's was even shorter: Po. Virtually all the ballots cast had a Po in them. Humiliated, Aga Simmabi migrated to the United States. In her anger, she left behind Dagot. Dagot ended up a caddy at Wack Wack.

In his speech as guest of honor during the 201st year of the PSA Awards of Pangasinan, Anggapo So Taloto lived up to his billing as a man of action but with few words. To prove that, his speech consisted of only two words: "Salamat po!"

He received a standing ovation.

***

FASTBREAK. As promised, Yeng Guiao made sure I was among the first to know that he's running in the May elections. "Yes, I've made my decision just now," he said. "I am running for vice governor of Pampanga, with Mark Lapid as my gubernatorial bet. And yes, I'll remain head coach of Batang Red Bull, with but minor changes in the coaching staff." Yeng's departed father, Bren, used to be governor of Pampanga. All the best, Yeng.

RP LADIES OPEN

Roberto moves up by 1

By Jong Arcano

LORA Roberto—one of the smallest players in the field at barely five feet—towered over the field with a three-over-par 74 yesterday that gave her the opening-round lead in the 2004 Philippine Ladies Open golf championship.

The 24-year-old Roberto, who finally made it to the national team last year, lost steam after a superb start at the Manila Golf Club course but still finished with a one-shot lead over an early-starting Lucy Landicho.

Landicho submitted her score of 75 with half of the 88-player field of the tourney organized by the Women's Golf Association of the Philippines still to tee off. There was only one who got past her all afternoon—Roberto.

Francis Bondad was the best-placed foreign entry with her 77 giving the Australian solo third.

The lady expected to occupy the top spot, Carmelette Villaroman, didn't play well enough. She will start today's second round four shots behind her practice partner at Southwoods after a 78 that left her in fourth with Eva Minoza and Anna Yu of Hong Kong.

Not too far behind were jungolfers Remijin Camping (79) and Jayvie Agojo and Geleen Handog who both scored 80s.

The 24-year-old Roberto appeared ready for a breakaway with an impressive start where she played the first 10 holes at one under, holing a 16-footer for birdie on the sixth and saving three pars from the bunker.

She finally yielded a stroke from the sand trap on the 11th until a bad break cost her a double-bogey on the 14th where her tee shot ended up in a difficult lie in the right bunker.

"After saving some shots from the bunker, I get that double. It's really a crazy game sometimes," said Roberto.

After sinking a six-foot birdie on the par-5 15th, she finished with two bogeys on the last two holes considered the toughest in the exclusive course.

Sponsors of the tournament are Pagcor, PCSO, the First Gentleman Foundation, Golden Donuts, Rep. Gilberto Duavit, Equitable-PCI Bank, Inquirer Golf Monthly, ICTSI, Slazenger, Nike Park and Crucible Gallery.

1st round scores:
74—Lora Roberto
75—Lucy Landicho
77—Francis Bondad (Australia)
78—Carmelette Villaroman, Eva Minoza, Anna Yu (Hong Kong)
79—Remijin Camping
80—Geleen Handog, Jayvie Agojo, Pamela Chien (Singapore)

PDI PHOTO

ROBERTO: Towering performance.

Rotary tilt unfolds at John Hay, BCC

BAGUIO CITY—The hunt for prizes totaling almost P4 million is on as 350 players tee off today (Thursday, Jan. 15) for the Rotary Golfing Fellowship Foundation of the Philippines (RGFFP) northern leg tournament at the Camp John Hay and Baguio Country Club courses here.

More than their quest for the team and individual honors, the big field is out to make the most of the 17 chances to ring the jackpot bell coming in the form of a St. Monique duplex home, a million pesos in cash , a brand-new Toyota Altis and a combination of Rolex watch, Taylor Made golf set and television set.

All these prizes are up for grabs in various holes of the two courses of Camp John Hay and BCC which have given their major support for the 36-hole tourney spread out in three days by subsidizing the green fees of the huge field.

The 18th edition of the RGFFP tourney has also drawn the chief backing of Fedex, Smart Communications, PLDT and Globe Asiatic Realty. Other sponsors are GNC, Sta. Lucia Realty, Primal Enterprises, Cebu Pacific, Copacabana Hotel, Pilipinas Shell, Futura Window Covering, Taylor Made and Enriquez Security Services Inc.

RGFFP officials, headed by its chair Melito "Bimbo" Salazar, president/CEO Poch Borromeo and EVP/COO Albert Que, are supervising the operations of the tourney which has become one of the biggest in its long history.

Apart from tournament operations, they have been coordinating the nightly parties including tonight's launching of the new RGFFP logo in a dinner hosted by Salazar.

Competing teams are vying for the top awards in five divisions using their average handicaps—Founders, Governors, Presidents and Fellowship divisions. Each team is allowed to field a maximum of four players with the best three counting. Individual awards will be given to top finishers, also according to their handicaps, in Flights A, B, C, D and a separate E category for seniors 65 years and above.

'Big Wiesy' impresses Els

HONOLULU—Michelle Wie made a believer out of Ernie Els.

The Big Easy finally played with the 14-year-old prodigy and discovered why she's called the "Big Wiesy." Els was impressed with the rhythm of her swing—easy—and predicted she would be the female version of Tiger Woods.

"I saw Tiger before he turned pro," Els said. "I think Michelle, a lot of what she did today reminds me a lot of what Tiger used to do. As a woman golfer, she's going to take it to the next level."

Tom Lehman gave her the nickname "Big Wiesy" two years ago because her height and tempo reminded him of Els. *AP*

Aguilar top 'moto' favorite

ASIA-PACIFIC champion Glenn Aguilar of the Caltex-Revtex team sets out as the overwhelming favorite in the season-opening Philippine National Motocross Championship Saturday at the Batangas Provincial Sports Complex, Bolbok, Sta. Rita, Batangas City.

The 27-year-old Aguilar is coming off his most successful year in motocross. Last season, Aguilar became the first and only Filipino to have ever won the Asian FIM crown, the region's most prestigious title.

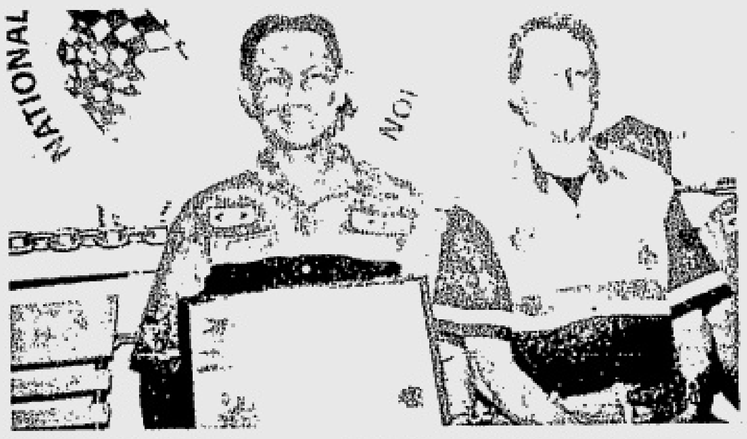
Aguilar also clinched a record seventh National Rider of the Year award given by the National Motorcycle Sports and Safety Association (Namssa). His achievements have earned him a citation from the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA).

He will banner a Revtex team, also composed of Bebet dela Cruz, Jerry Beech, Johnny Garcia, Alvin Beech, Eric Mitra, Brian Villarde, Tony Juanitas and Wonder Boy Kenneth San Andres. "The year 2003 was a fruitful one not just for me but for the entire Caltex organization," said Aguilar, who is also backed by Oakley, No Fear, HJC Helmets, Pro Grip, Renthal, Sidi Boots and Atoy Bodykit. "I hope that the new year won't be a different one."

The event, also dubbed as the 2nd Mayor's Cup National Motocross Championship, is being sanctioned by Namssa, headed by Ken Falco, in cooperation with Mayor Eddie Dimacuha of Batangas City. Aguilar will be taking part in the premier pro open division and the pro 125 category in the one-day event organized by MP Turbo.

"Aguilar and the Revtex team sets out on another journey that will cement our reputation as the best motocross team in the land today," said Revtex team manager Ner Marquez Dormiendo. "Our riders' hard work and dedication are always a given in all of our campaigns. Another constant is the Revtex oil that we use, a factor that has never let us down through the years."

Actually, Aguilar is coming off a swashbuckling victory in the 1st Koronadal Invitational Motocross. The Revtex team captain left no doubts as to who is the country's best rider as he ruled both the speed races along a flat course and the premier Supercross event.



AGUILAR (left) with Namssa president Ken Falco during the recent Namssa Awards night, where the Asia-Pacific champion was awarded his seventh National Rider of the Year title.

Federer, Agassi, Roddick win; Henin, Hewitt wallop rivals

MELBOURNE, Australia—After winning his first Grand Slam and seven other tournaments in 2003, Roger Federer knows last year will be a tough act to follow.

"For me, as soon as I started preparing for the next year, I had to start forgetting about what I've achieved," Federer said Wednesday after opening the Commonwealth Bank International exhibition tournament at Kooyong with a 6-4, 6-7 (2), 6-3 win over Sweden's Thomas Johansson.

Federer won Wimbledon and the Masters Cup. He also improved his ranking for the sixth successive year, finishing 2003 at No. 2 behind American Andy Roddick.

In other matches Wednesday at Kooyong, Roddick beat countryman Robby Ginepri, 6-1, 6-3, and Andre Agassi defeated Sebastien Grosjean of France, 6-3, 6-3.

The round-robin tournament ends Saturday and is one of nine tuneup events in the two-week period leading into the Australian Open which begins Monday.

In Sydney, world No. 1 Justine Henin-Hardenne opened her season with a 6-4, 6-1 victory Wednesday over Conchita Martinez in the Adidas International.

Amelie Mauresmo of France and American Lindsay Davenport, seeded third and fourth, also advanced to the quarterfinals.

Mauresmo beat American Meghann Shaughnessy, 6-2, 6-3, after wasting a match point on serve at 5-1 in the second set. Davenport rallied for a 1-6, 6-2, 7-5 win over Vera Zvonareva.

Carlos Moya maintained his unbeaten start to the season with a 7-6 (5), 6-3 win over Michael Llodra of France.

Former world No. 1 Lleyton Hewitt won nine consecutive games after trailing 0-4 in the first set to beat Slovakian Karol Kucera, 6-4, 6-1, and clinch a quarterfinal berth against Frenchman Arnaud Clement, a 6-4, 7-5 winner over Swedish qualifier Joachim Johansson. *AP*

Pacquiao is best . . .

From page A19

the top 10 since the pound-for-pound category was introduced, is ranked ahead of junior welter king Kostya Tszyu (No. 7), Mexican living legend Erik Morales (No. 8), Nicaraguan wonder boy Ricardo Mayorga (No. 9), and James Toney (No. 10).

Topping the pound-for-pound list is Roy Jones Jr., followed by Bernard Hopkins, Shane Mosley, Oscar De la Hoya and Floyd Mayweather Jr.

NBC stars make Rookie Draft

TEN players who made good in the community-based National Basketball Conference (formerly called National Basketball League) are among the 49 applicants for the 2004 PBA Rookie Draft set tomorrow at the Glorietta Activity Center in Makati City.

Leading the pack are Panasonic Cup MVP Boyet Guerrero of Shineway/Compak-Ozamiz City and fellow Mythical Five member Mario Reyes of Spring Cooking Oil-San Pablo.

The other NBC stars who displayed their wares in the Rookie Camp held last Sunday at the QC Memorial Circle are Christopher Quimpo of Forward Taguig, Steve Marucot (Sulpicio Lines-Pampanga), Arnold Booker (Ozamiz), Alvin Pua (Sulpicio Lines), John Alwyn Flores (Ozamiz), Jessie Lumantas (M. Lhuillier-Cebu), Joel Lagare (Wang's Ball Club-Mandaluyong), and Ricky Ricafuente (Restolax/Mail & More-MayniLA).

NBC secretary general Tito Palma pointed out that other draftees like James Yap and Paul Artadi of UE, Warrne Ybanez of M. Lhuillier and Nelbert Omolon of ML-Kwarta Padala also had brief stints in the NBC. "UE was guest team in last year's Sinulog Cup," explained Palma.

Several PBA veterans and stars in the defunct MBA are currently playing for various NBC teams, which are now preparing for the 2004 Panasonic Sinulog Cup slated Jan. 25-30 in Cebu City.

Ferrer, Camat prevail

From page A19

World junior campaigner and Vietnam Southeast Asian Games silver medalist, was in command throughout, peppering Pujiono with jabs and crosses whenever the Indon pressed the attack.

The California-based Camat trailed after the first round, but dominated the succeeding rounds with combinations that jarred Farminder several times.

It was Joven's narrow escape that caught the fancy of the big crowd.

By the end of the third round, Joven still trailed the Iraqi by two points. The Filipino went on the offensive in the fourth and went ahead by two going into the last 10 seconds.

The instruction by the coaching staff of George Caliwan, Boy Velasco and Pat Gaspi for Joven to just dance the seconds away was drowned by the shouts of the crowd, however.

The Filipino got tagged twice in the corner before the buzzer rang, necessitating the tie-break.

"*Akala namin matatalo pa* (I thought we would lose)," said Gaspi.

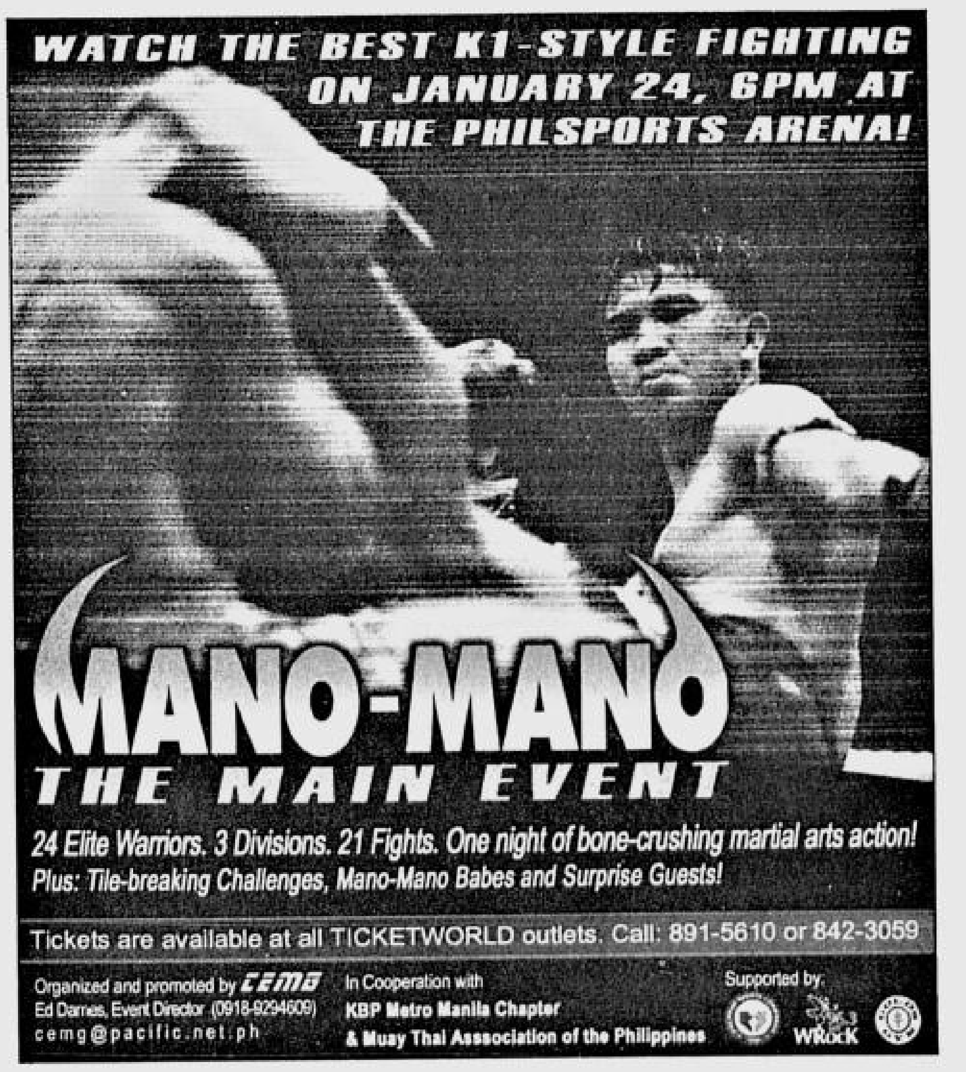
With seven men standing, the Filipinos are on track of meeting their target of at least four qualifiers for the Athens Olympics.

"Let's hope that our boys will stay focused. The Olympic slots are within their reach, said Manny Lopez, president of the organizing Amateur Boxing Association of the Philippines.

The finalists in the nine lower divisions and the heavyweight and super heavyweight champions in the tournament advance to Athens.

Since the Amateur International Boxing Association has allotted 24 slots here, the bronze medalists in the light flyweight, flyweight, bantam and featherweight division would also qualify.

Apart from the tournament, Olympic qualifiers will also be held in Pakistan and China to determine the Asian boxing cast in Greece.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Alden Joshua Cedo, Graphics Design

Mandarin Oriental celebrates traditional lunar year welcome with Joseph Chau

MANDARIN Oriental, Manila continues its nine-year tradition as it celebrates the dawning of the Year of the Wooden Monkey on Jan. 21. Touted as the country's biggest lunar year welcome outside of Binondo, and attended by prominent personalities from diplomatic, social, business and media circles, the event will be directed by noted Hong Kong-based geomancer Master Joseph Chau.

In collaboration with Motorola, PLDT myDSL, Citigold, Lifestyle Network, Volvo, and supported by the City Government of Makati, the spectacular event unfolds on the eve of the Year of the Monkey at 11:30 p.m. on Jan. 21. Expect a colorful and festive motorcade led by Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay and other dignitaries, traversing an auspicious route mapped out by Master Chau. The route begins and ends at Mandarin Oriental and passes through the main thoroughfares of Paseo de Roxas, Makati Avenue all the way to the Greenbelt and West Drive junction and back. Revelers may wish to join the foot parade that precedes the motorcade and covers a shorter route-from the hotel towards Makati Avenue, Cruzada, Paseo de Roxas and back to the hotel. Another fun-filled highlight is a monkey and dog show to be staged near the hotel's parking lot for entertainment while the motorcade is underway. A "Paai-Shan" ceremony-a hearty lion and dragon dance-following an eye-dotting ceremony, and a burst of colorful fireworks to dispel bad luck complete the extravaganza.

Capping the celebration is a midnight buffet, the first lucky meal of the year offered at P1,188++ (adult) and P888++ (child) at Tin Hau, Clipper Lounge and the Captain's Bar where the Shin Yih cultural group performs. Meal ticket holders will be given a complimentary copy of the "2004 Year of the Monkey Forecast" written by Joseph Chau. The comprehensive primer, Master Chau's fourth publication in collaboration with Mandarin Oriental, will also be sold at the Lobby Shop for P288 starting Jan. 21.

The hotel also offers special room packages for local residents on Wednesday night, eve of the Year of the Monkey. Starting at P5,588++ for an overnight stay in a superior room, the Silver Monkey package includes a New Year midnight buffet for two, American breakfast for two at Tin Hau, welcome fruit plate and drink, and a complimentary copy of Master Chau's book. An additional night's stay including breakfast is offered at P3,500++. Children below 12 are free of charge when sharing the room with their parents.

Other exciting room packages, Club accommodations and extension rates inclusive of breakfast are also available. For reservations and inquiries, call Mandarin Oriental at 7508888 ext. 2401 (programme and midnight buffet tickets) or ext. 2304 (room reservations).

POMP and circumstance mark Mandarin Oriental, Manila's traditional lunar year welcome as shown in this photo taken at last year's celebration to welcome the Year of the Ram. Expect no less as the hotel, together with Feng Shui expert Joseph Chau, usher in the Year of the Wooden Monkey on January 21 from 11:30 p.m. onwards with much funfare and excitement.

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A weekly directory of the country's best establishments

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www.marriott.com

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www.shangri-la.com

Dusit Hotel Nikko
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Tel. 867-3333 Email: dusitmnl@dusit.com
http://manila.dusit.com

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Dusit wishes you 'Gong Xi Fa Cai'

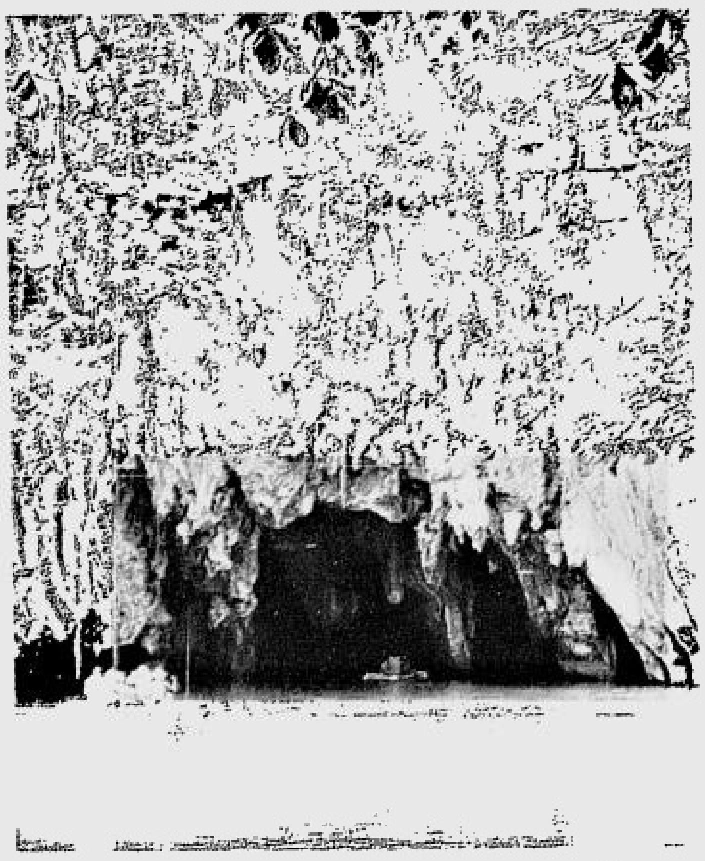
GONG Xi Fa Cai (Wishing you good fortune)!

It is 2004, year of the Green Monkey in the Chinese Calendar and also a leap year. Which is why Dusit Hotel Nikko has reasons to celebrate as these are good signs of leaping ahead.

The monkey is a symbol of energy, activity, and loyalty. To double your luck and attract good fortune, welcome the Chinese New Year with your family and friends at The Café Restaurant of Dusit Hotel Nikko from Jan. 21, 6 p.m. to Jan. 25. Savor some of the best of Chinese cuisine, buffet style, from a wide array of authentic Chinese dishes pegged at P750++ for lunch and P800++ for dinner. Diners (minimum of two persons) will also be gifted with the traditional tikoy.

Guests may also purchase other Chinese delicacies such as tikoy, buchi and others from the hotel's Deli Shop.

For queries and reservations, please call 867-3333 extension 3346.



Barcelo Asturias Hotel's exhilirating Palawan adventure

PUERTO Princesa, Palawan is one of the most exciting places to visit. Tourists often go home with vivid memories of its natural beauty, exotic landscapes and endless adventure offerings.

Barceló Asturias Hotel gives you another reason to enjoy and explore Palawan's treasure with its special "Puerto Princesa Escapades!"

At only P4,500 net per person, this entitles adventure lovers to a three days and two nights accommodation, roundtrip airport transfers, full board meals and a city tour. Guests are given a choice to pick an adventure tour of either the renowned St. Paul's Underground River or Honda Bay island-hopping. To relax, guests have the privilege to use the hotel swimming pool and the Jacuzzi for free.

The "Puerto Princesa Escapades!" package is part of the hotel's thrust of promoting eco-tourism and meeting the increasing demand of its valued patrons. This is valid until June 31.

The Mediterranean Villa-inspired Barceló Asturias Hotel is regarded as the choice hotel to experience Puerto Princesa to its fullest. Nestled in a serene environment and inviting in its subdued elegance, the hotel's character is a much welcome relief from flashy hotels. Sixty tastefully furnished rooms line two floors and are positioned to view a recreational area (swimming pool and Jacuzzi amidst a tropical garden).

Barceló Asturias Hotel invites you to explore Palawan and rediscover the zest for adventure through the "Puerto Princesa Escapades!" For inquiries and reservations, call their Manila Sales Office at 899-4398 or 889-1000 or visit www.barcelo-asia.com.

New World Renaissance swings into the Year of the Monkey

THE NEW WORLD Renaissance Hotel grandly ushers in the Year of the Monkey with a line-up of festive offerings as its way of saying "Kung Hei Fat Choy". Guests are welcomed to the hotel by an impressive Chinese Garden complete with lanterns and pond at the lobby. Furthermore, a Chinese Calligraphist performs his art to the public on Jan. 22. Prosperity Twin Fish Tikoy giveaway will also be sold at an attractive booth as good luck gift. On Chinese New Year's Day itself on Jan 22, a fantastic Lion and Dragon Dance by the reputable Ling Nam Athletic Association, starts at the lobby and makes its way to all the hotel's restaurants, specially Emperor Court, at 1 p.m.

The hotel's fine Cantonese restaurant Emperor Court goes on full gear as it offers an extra-special Chinese New Year's Menu full of festive fare for groups and individual a la carte items for lunch and dinner until Jan. 25. Chinese Executive Chef Ken Chiu and his team display their culinary prowess with dishes offered in this menu such as: Double Boiled Superior Shark's Fin Soup, Braised Abalone with Sea Cucumber and Black Mushroom, Roast Suckling Pig with Baked Glutinous Rice Squid, Deep Fried Crispy Pigeon Stuffed with Lotus Seed and Meat, among other mouth-watering selections. On Jan. 21 to 23, an overwhelming buffet of Chinese favorites is laid out for lunch and dinner as well. A Chinese musical ensemble complements lunch and dinner on Jan. 21 and 22 with authentic Chinese music. Furthermore, the "God of Fortune" will be going around the restaurant handing out lucky "angpaos" during lunch and dinner on Jan. 22. For reservations, please call 811 6888.

Waterfront's new corporate director

WATERFRONT Philippines Inc (WPI), the country's largest and only Filipino-owned hotel chain recently appointed Joey D. Bernardino as officer-in-charge for marketing. Until recently, Bernardino was Dusit Hotel Nikko's Director of Sales. He was also the Sr. Sales Manager of Makati Shangri-La Hotel for eight years, starting off as a management trainee and building a career in sales and marketing. "We're very proud to have Mr. Bernardino join our team, with his vast exposure to the hotel industry, we're optimistic that he can help us add value to our hotels and WPI's overall portfolio" elates Rexlon Gatchalian, EVP hotel operations of the chain.

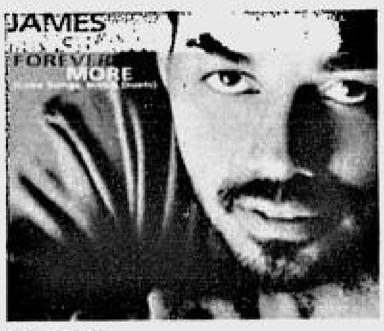
Ingram, Austin together for the first time

MULTIPLE Grammy winner James Ingram and soul diva Patti Austin will perform back to back in the Valentine show "James Ingram and Patti Austin Heart to Heart—Live in Manila" on Feb. 14, 8:30 p.m., at the Manila Film Center Open Ground at the CCP Complex.

This is the first time Ingram and Austin are performing together in a show.

Tickets to the Ingram-Austin concert are on sale at all SM Ticketnet outlets: reserved seats, P1,932 and P1,305; and regular seats, P783 and P366 (inclusive of Ticketnet's 4.4-percent service charge).

For sales inquiries, call Ticketnet, 911-5555, or Icon Productions, 373-5734.



INGRAM

AUSTIN

The show will feature the endearing ballads "One Hundred Ways," "She Loves Me," "Say You Love Me," "True Love," "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," "Where Did My Heart Go?" "There's No Easy Way," "Somewhere Out There," "If I Believe," "All Behind Us Now," "In My Life," "Ya Mo B There," "Whatever We Imagine" and "Just Once," as well as their monster hits "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?" and "Baby Come to Me."

Mamma Mia! Abba in Manila!

From page A24

movie's premiere in December 1977 coincided with the release of "Abba—The Album," which included "The Name of the Game" and "Take a Chance on Me."

Despite the group's breakup in the early '80s, Abba's music lives on. The CD "Abba Gold," released in 1992, has sold 25 million copies to date. The 1993 companion album, "More Abba Gold," sold 2.5 million copies. The box set "Thank You for the Music" followed in 1994, containing all the hits, selected album tracks, and previously unreleased recordings.

In 1999, the musical "Mamma Mia!" premiered in London. Featuring mostly Abba music, it is still running in New York and London.

"Abba—The Music: A Valentine Retro Party" is produced by ALV Events International. For ticket reservations, call 633-98-25 to 27 or Ticketnet outlets (911-5555).

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2 KILL BILL	2 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3	2 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3 10:40 2:00 5:50 9:40	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 2 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3 12:25 4:15	2 KILL BILL
3 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 3 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3 [illegible]	Onstage REPERTORY'S M. BUTTERFLY Jan 9, 10 & 11	GUARANTEED SEATS 3 THE GATHERING 1:30 3:30 5:30 7:30 9:30 11:30	3 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3
4 BRIDAL SHOWER	4 BUFFALO SOLDIER		GUARANTEED SEATS 4 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3 [illegible] 11:00	4 CRYING LADIES
	5 THE GATHERING		GUARANTEED SEATS 5 KILL BILL 12:15 2:30 4:45	5 THE LORD OF THE RINGS 3
	6 KILL BILL			
	7 MEMENTO MORI			

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ROBEN	BOLD STAR
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY / LEGEND OF CROCODILE
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	BRIDAL SHOWER
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR
NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	SEX SCANDAL
B	LORD OF THE RINGS
C	
MANDALUYONG CITY	
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STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	MANO PO 2
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CINEMA-3	FANTASTIC MAN
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LOTR 3. RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	CAPTAIN BARBELL
CINEMA-6	FILIPINAS
CINEMA-7	GAGAMBOY
CINEMA-8	CRYING LADIES
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	LOTR 3. RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LOTR 3. RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	LOTR 3. RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-12	LOTR 3. RETURN OF THE KING
CINEMA-14	KILL BILL
CINEMA-15	BRIDAL SHOWER
LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
(LAS PINAS)	LORD OF THE RINGS 3
CINEMA-1	GOOD BOY
CINEMA-2	HOMECOMING
CINEMA-4	SCARY MOVIE 3
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARANAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
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LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING PG13 1:40, 5:35, 9:30	BUFFALO SOLDIERS R13 12:30, 2:40, 4:50, 7:00, 9:10	LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING PG13 2:40, 6:35, 10:30

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9 (dolby) LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

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(Caloocan) tel 364.3781
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2 BRIDAL SHOWER
3 MALIKMATA
4 (sdds) LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
5 KILL BILL
6 (dolby) LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
7 (dts) GAGAMBOY
8 FANTASIC MAN
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Oscar tipsters' choices

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

THE FINALISTS for the 2003 Oscar awards will be announced soon, but some film buffs just can't wait, so they've been checking with Hollywood insiders for advance word on the likely frontrunner.

The tipsters' choices:

For Best Picture—"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," "The Last Samurai," "Mystic River," "Cold Mountain," "Lost in Translation," "Seabiscuit."

The Best Actor trophy is expected to be fiercely fought over by the likes of **Sean Penn** in "Mystic River," **Jude Law** in "Cold Mountain," **Bill Murray** in "Lost in Translation," and **Tom Cruise** in "The Last Samurai."

Dark horses in other films include **Anthony Hopkins** in "The Human Stain" and **Michael Caine** in "The Statement."

Best Actress—**Gwyneth Paltrow** in "Sylvia," **Nicole Kidman** in "Cold Mountain," **Cate Blanchett** in "Veronica Guerin," **Jennifer Connelly** in "House of Sand and Fog," and **Charlize Theron** in "Monster."

And Best Director—**Clint Eastwood** for "Mystic River," **Sofia Coppola** for "Lost in Translation," **Peter Jackson** for "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," **Anthony Minghella** for "Cold Mountain," and **Ed Zwick** for "The Last Samurai."

'Finding Nemo' is seen to be a shoo-in

BLANCHETT

KIDMAN

THERON

LAW

PENN

CRUISE

In a few weeks' time, we'll see which of these predicted nominations pan out. The next and bigger question, of course, is who the ultimate winners will be. Can our "cinematic seers" project that far ahead?

Some can: Their "fearless albeit fearful" forecast taps "The Return of the King" for the Best Picture plum, **Sean Penn** for Best Actor, **Charlize Theron** for Best Actress, and **Peter Jackson** for Best Director.

Additional prediction: "Finding Nemo" is seen to be a shoo-in for the Best Animated Feature award. Some fish have all the luck!

The problem with these predictions, of course, is that we in the Philippines haven't gotten a chance to see many of the highly-touted productions. They're regarded by distributors as too "uncommercial" to release in these parts, so we can't affirm or contradict what the prognosticators have been saying.

All the more reason, therefore, for local film buffs to go out of their way to patronize the good movies that do get released here. If these quality films make money, it'll be easier to convince distributors to screen even less traditionally commercial productions in local movie houses.

That way, when outstanding movies are touted for awards, we can react more intelligently, because we have already seen them, and can confidently compare their respective strong points to arrive at our informed choices of the definitive winners.

Jason Mraz

JASON Mraz will perform his hit songs at the Aliw Theater, CCP complex, on Feb. 21. The concert, "Jason Mraz Live in Manila," showcases songs from Mraz's debut album, "Waiting for My Rocket to Come," including "The Remedy," "You and I Both," "No Stopping Us," "Sleep All Day" and "Curbside Prophet."

Mraz has been cited by Magic 89.9 as Best Male Artist, and also for Best Album of the Year ("Waiting for My Rocket to Come") and Best Alternative Song ("The Remedy"). Call 561-0442

'Reign of Fire'

AT 9 p.m. on Jan. 18, Star Movies screens "Reign of Fire," with repeat screening at 9 p.m. on Jan 31.

An enormous, fire-breathing beast is inadvertently awakened from its centuries-long slumber in London. A hotshot American (**Matthew McConaughey**) tells fire chief Quinn (**Christian Bale**) that he can kill the beast and save mankind. Rob Bowman directs.

'Brother Bear'

AT 4:30 p.m. on Jan. 17, Walt Disney Pictures' latest hit animated feature, "Brother Bear," will be previewed at SM Megamall Cinema 1.

The Mellow Touch 94.7 premiere presentation is about a young man named Kenai (voiced by **Joaquin Phoenix**), who discovers the true nature of bravery and brotherhood when he is turned into a bear.

"Brother Bear" features new songs by **Phil Collins**.

"THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC." Almost three decades later, Abba's music still rules

Mamma Mia! Abba in Manila!

SHOW TIME

THE SWINGING '70s rock comes back to life as "Abba—The Music" comes to Manila for a Valentine's Day retro party at the PSC-Ultra on Feb. 14, and to Cebu at the Waterfront on Feb. 13.

The entourage of "Abba—The Music" includes its own back-up dancers and singers, as well as the Swedish cover band Waterloo featuring two original members, Mats Ronander and Ulf Andersson.

Abba was composed of Björn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson, Agnetha Fältskog and Anni-Frid Lyngstad when it became very popular worldwide in the '70s with such hits as "Dancing Queen," "The Winner Takes It All," "Thank You for the Music," "Knowing Me, Knowing You," "Fernando," "Take a Chance on Me," "Chiquitita," "The Name of the Game," and many others.

In April 1977, "Dancing Queen" was No. 1 in the US. In late 1976, Abba's fourth album, "Arrival," spawned the hits "Money, Money, Money" and "Knowing Me, Knowing You." This was followed by a concert tour of Europe and Australia between January and March 1977. When the tour reached Australia, work began on "Abba—The Movie." The

MAMMA/ A23

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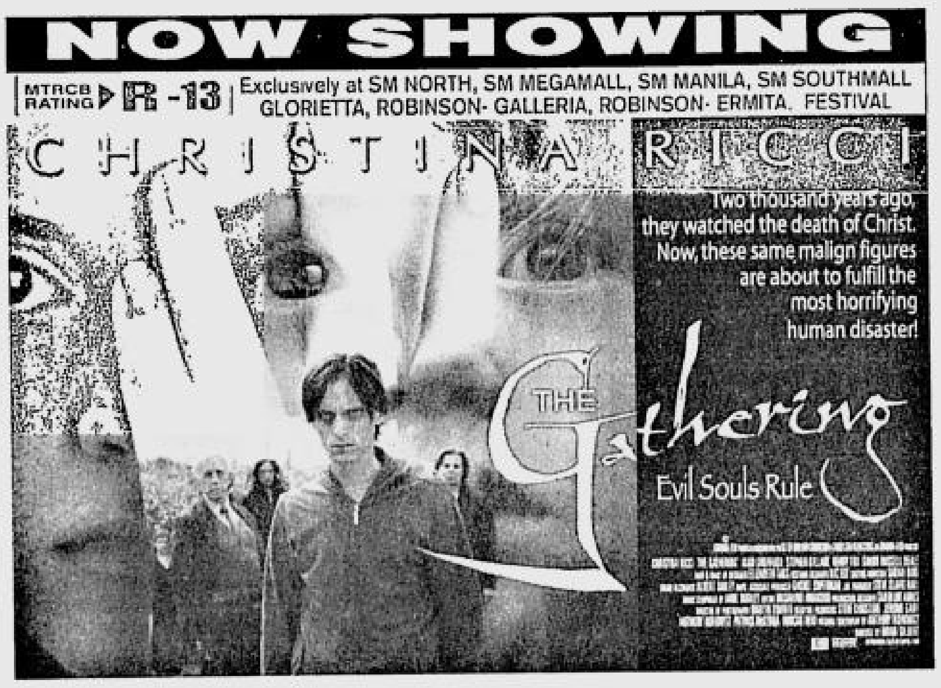
THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE RETURN OF THE KING



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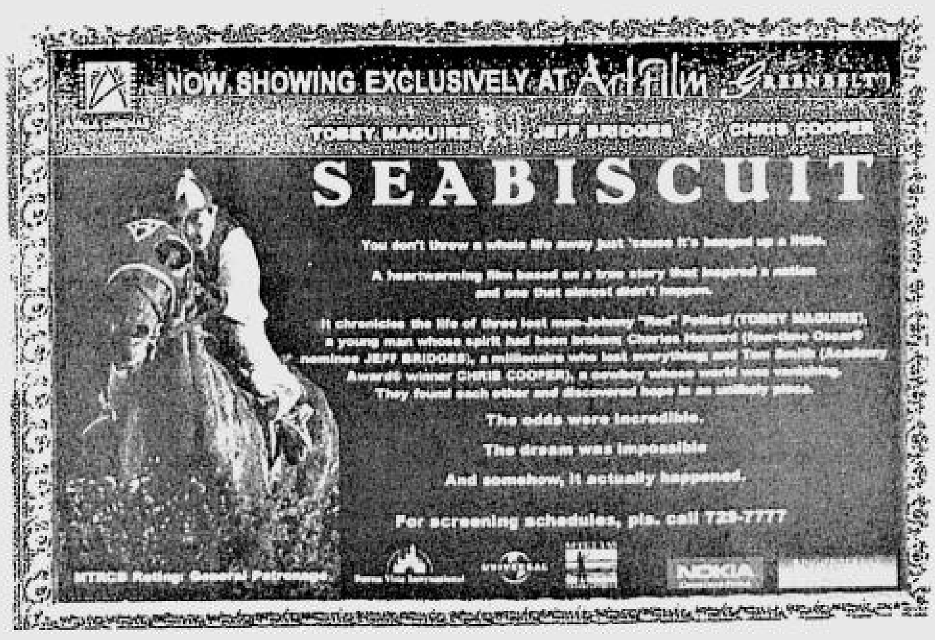

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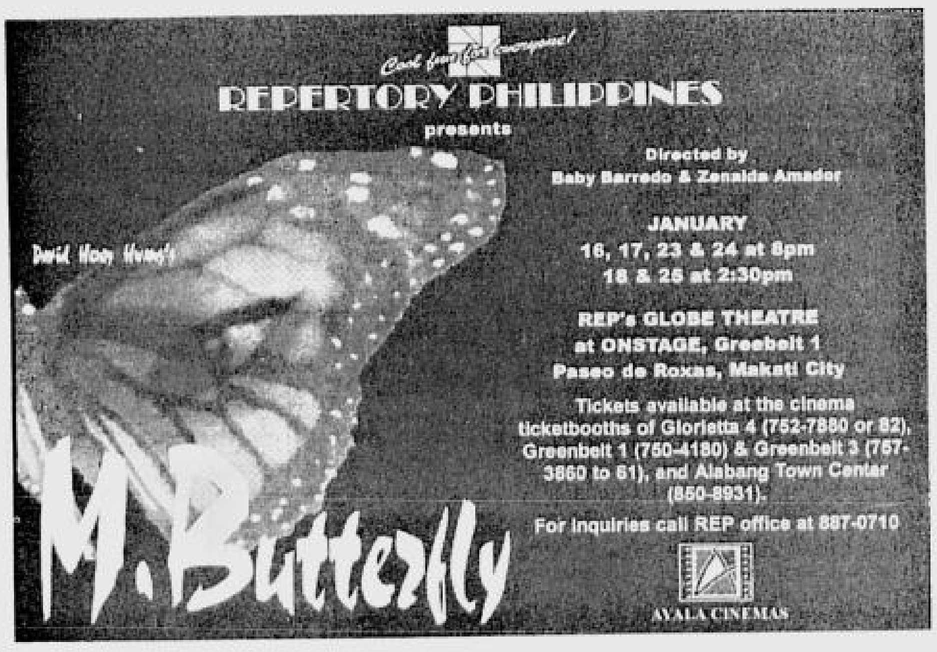

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE RETURN OF THE KING

TV host seeing politician; young star has nose job

DOLLY WOOD
Dolly Ann Carvajal

GUESS who this TV host is who's seeing a politico on the sly.

That may be nothing new since the line between show biz and politics seems non-existent anymore, what with actors turning politicians and politicians acting up and dating movie stars.

The catch is that Ms TV host is also having a dangerous liaison with the son of another politico who's very much married and has kids. The maids of the politico's son are appalled at how the TV host throws her weight around when she's at the man's place. "*Daig pa niyang umasta ang tunay na asawa,*" as the helpers put it.

They say that when they tell the TV host to hurry up and leave because the wife is on the way home, the TV host refuses to go unless she's fed first, which makes the maids fed up.

***

Guess who this young star is who had her nose done during the holidays.

Nothing wrong with that. It's her nose and she is free to do anything with it. The trouble is her nosey costar in a soon-to-open show is the one spreading the news. Perhaps the costar is envious, so she better get a nose job herself.

Will the young star catch her costar red-handed, or red-nosed, as the culprit behind all the cheap talk about her? Talk about having a nose for gossip.

New year, new intrigues

OGIE Alcasid remains unperturbed about the never-ending rumor linking him to **Regine Velasquez.**

"It's a new year, so new intrigues," he says sardonically. "That rumor should have ended with 2003."

Both Regine and Ogie have nothing to be guilty about, that's why they have no apprehensions about having a Valentine show ("The Songbird & The Songwriter," Feb. 14 at Clark Expo, and Feb. 15 at the Big Dome).

"Regine and I have come to accept that intrigues are part of show biz," says Ogie. "We choose to ignore such rumors. Besides, we have long planned the Valentine show so we see no point in letting rumors ruin it."

Ogie is fresh from a holiday break in Australia, where his wife, **Michelle**, and kids are based. Their long distance setup all the more fuels talk that they have split up. Ogie just shrugs off such insinuations.

"Michelle is immune already to rumors," he says. "But of course, she's only human. There are times when she worries, too, although I keep reassuring her that there's no truth to it at all.

"We agreed that it's best for our kids to grow up in Australia. But it's nothing permanent. Anytime, they can move back here. I visit them as often as possible and I think the distance makes us miss each other more so our marriage becomes more exciting.

"I find it odd when people say we have separated just because she's staying in Oz now. That's only physical. Our marriage is way beyond the physical aspect. And any guy will find a way to stray even if his wife guards him like a hawk. I have always been a family man and no amount of temptation will make me become unfaithful to my wife."

Pia's workout

PIA Guanio is ecstatic about the release of her "Aerokaebo" workout VCD, produced by Vicor.

Pia gushed, "We used tae kwon do and boxing moves and an aerobic workout. A martial art instructor helped us out. It's the first localized home aerobic workout designed for Pinays. We took into consideration different fitness levels of Pinoys and their busy lifestyles."

If you want to have a to-die-for body like Pia's, check out her video.

She is also happy about her hosting stint on "Eat Bulaga." Although Pia used to be with "Masayang Tanghali Bayan," the rival show of "Eat Bulaga," she says there is no bad blood between her and ABS-CBN. She says she's eternally grateful for all the breaks that Channel 2 has given her. But she has to expand her horizons.

"I moved to GMA because of the 'Eat Bulaga' offer," she explained. "It's an honor to be part of the longest-running noontime show. I learn so much from my co-hosts. Everybody is so talented. Our backstage is like a show in itself.

"I don't want to compare my former co-hosts on 'MTB' with the ones I work with on 'Eat.' They all have their own styles and I respect them all."

Paolo comes home

CATCH acoustic wonder **Paolo Santos** on Monday, Jan. 26, when he goes back to his roots, Friends El Pueblo.

No matter how famous he has become, Paolo has not forgotten where it all began for him. Friends El Pueblo is where he is most at home (*comme moi*) so you can be assured that his repertoire will be longer and even more soulful than usual.

For feedback, e-mail friends_elpueblo@yahoo.com or dollyanne@truefaithband.com

DID YOU KNOW...

SINGER Regine Velasquez's dad, *Mang Gerry,* says he is so eager to have a grandchild from his eldest daughter that he no longer cares if Regine is married to the child's father or not. He says he plans to teach the child how to sing like the way he trained Regine. "This child will continue my legacy," he adds.

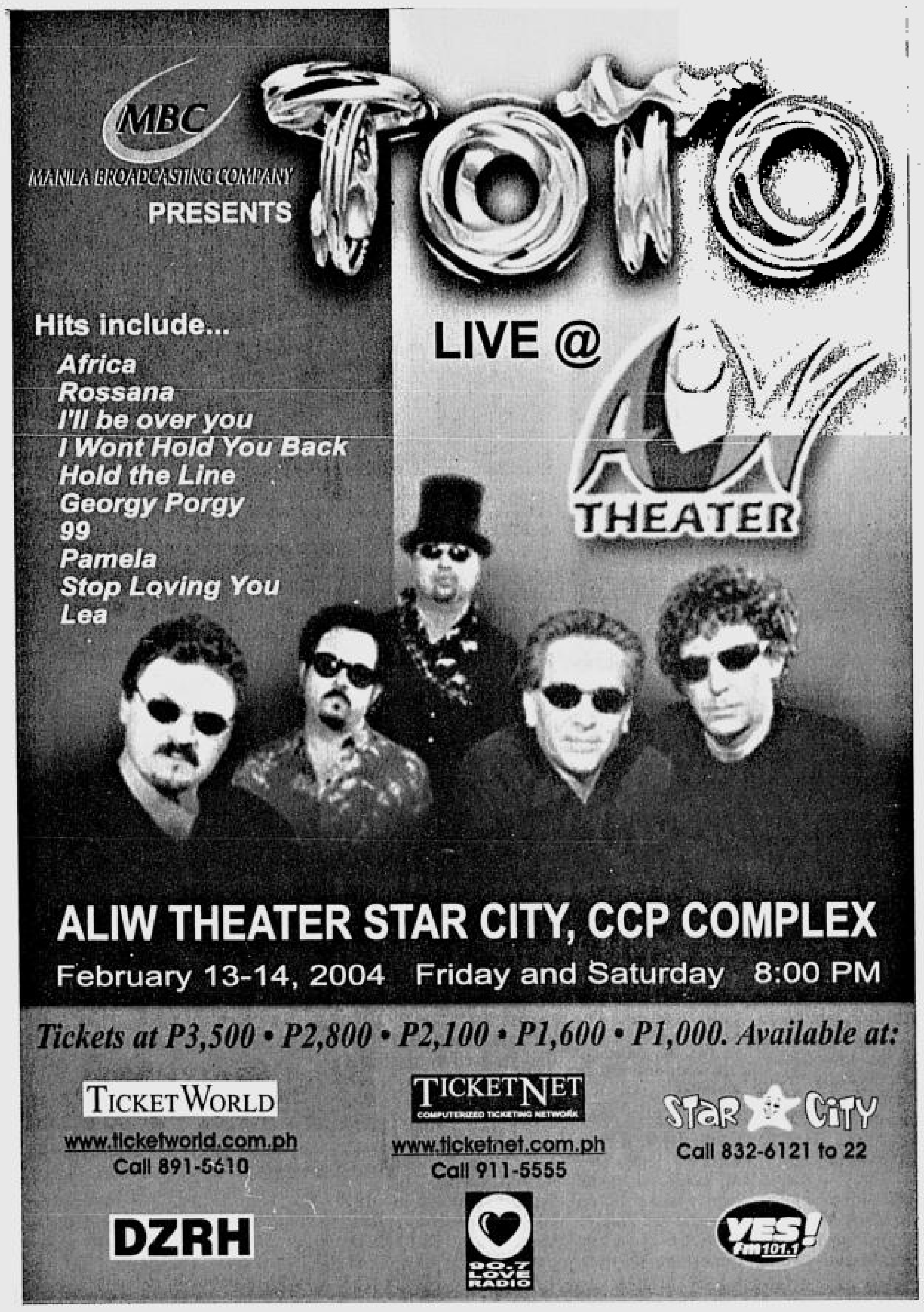
Rio: I wanted God to tell me there had been a mistake

From page A26

discovery: Rio was suffering from stage 4 colon cancer. Stage 4 meant the cancer was already widespread, and Rio's doctor decided to tell her she had only a few months to live.

"I kept begging the Lord to show me He was in control," recalls Rio. "I wanted Him to tell me there had been a mistake. What I realized was that God was sending me a bright-red neon message, one I had to figure out on my own."

"Maalaala Mo Kaya" airs on ABS-CBN.



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Ogie 'scared' but in fighting mood

By Marinel R. Cruz

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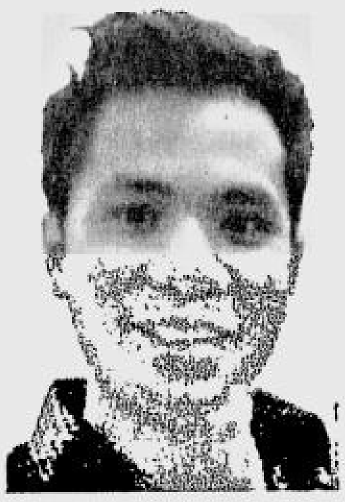
ALCASID. "Laban kung laban"

"*LABAN na kung laban* (Fight if we have to fight)," said singer-composer Ogie Alcasid, who will perform in a two-night Valentine concert with Regine Velasquez.

Ogie was referring to the competition from at least eight foreign acts who are scheduled to perform in Manila in February.

The concert of Ogie and Regine, called "The Songbird and the Songwriter... Journey of Love... Music to Remember," is the only major concert in February to feature local artists. It will be held at the Expo Filipino in Clarkfield, Pampanga on Feb. 14 and at the Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City on Feb. 15.

"We're scared (of how the arrival of foreign artists would affect our concert)," Ogie admitted last Tuesday. "But what can we do?

"But I'm confident that ours will be a successful show because there's always a market for local songs here," he added.

Regine said their show's repertoire is 90 percent OPM. She said this could mean a big difference.

"We will sing our songs, *pero puwede rin naming kantahin ang sa kanila*," she said of the foreign artists. "That's something they won't be able to do. (The foreign artists can't sing) our songs."

Better year

Ogie said February 2003 was better than this year for local artists. Filipino artists like Gary Valenciano, Martin Nievera, Side A, Freestyle and Ogie himself had Valentine concerts last year, but they only had to compete with composer-pianist Michel Legrand and the American soul group Boyz II Men.

Legrand performed in a concert with Regine for three nights at the PICC Plenary Hall. Boyz II Men had a one-night show at the Fort open field in Taguig.

This year, Ogie and Regine have to contend with the likes of Grammy Award-winner James Ingram and soul diva Patti Austin, who will be at the Manila Film Center Open Ground (beside PICC) on Feb. 14 at 8:30 p.m.

"James Ingram and Patti Austin 'Heart to Heart' Live in Manila" will have Ingram and Austin singing their popular duets such as "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?" and "Baby Come to Me." Tickets to their one-night show are P1,932, P1,305, P783 and P366.

Abba, Spiral Starecase

To be staged at the PhilSports Arena in Pasay City on the same night is "Abba—The Music," featuring the hits of the four-member Swedish pop group that reigned in the '70s. "Abba—The Music" will also be shown at the Waterfront in Cebu on Feb. 13.

The Abba music show is expected to include their hits like "Dancing Queen," "The Winner Takes it All," "Fernando," "Chiquitita" and "Thank You for the Music."

Also on Feb. 13, Spiral Starecase, the group behind the classic "More Today Than Yesterday," and the man who wrote it, Pat Upton, will be at the NBC Tent, in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig, in "Pat Upton: More Today Than Yesterday."

Still on the same night but at a much bigger venue are the soul group Boyz II Men back-to-back with singer/songwriter Brian McKnight in "Boyz II Men-Brian McKnight Back to Back Live in Manila." They will be performing at the Philsports open field in Pasay City.

F4, Bublé, Mraz

Two members of the popular Taiwanese group F4—Vanness Wu and Ken Zu—performed before a full house at Philsports last September. Unruly fans broke down the barricade at the open field exit during the F4 concert called "The Event," resulting in injuries to eight people.

Rumors are flying thick that the F4 will be back in Manila for the fourth time to perform in a concert on Feb. 14. Last November, the two other F4 members—Jerry Yan and Vic Zhou—joined ABS-CBN artists in the network's "Happy 50 TV" concert at The Fort Open Field. Less than a month later, all four members of F4 were back for a show at the Philsports Arena in Pasay.

On Feb. 23, American singer/songwriter Jason Mraz, who sang the recent hits "The Remedy," "You and I Both" and "Sleep All Day," is performing at the Aliw Theater at the Star City Complex with Paolo Santos.

Manila's current favorite Canadian crooner, Michael Bublé, will have his own show on Jan. 31 at the PICC Plenary Hall in Pasay City. This is the second time the 25-year-old singer is performing in Manila, following his September 2003 visit.

RIO AND CHARLIE Cojuangco. Questioning God, obeying God

Rio: I wanted God to tell me there had been a mistake

"MAALALA MO KAYA" tonight presents Eula Vadez portraying TV host and cancer fighter Rio Diaz.

Another acclaimed actor, Ricky Davao, plays Rio's husband, Charlie Cojuangco.

Rio, the youngest of a family of famously beautiful women, is herself a former beauty queen, actress and television host. In the late 1990s, she was hosting ABS-CBN's cooking show "Sarap TV" and was at the same time doing her duties as vice mayor of Pontevedra, Negros Occidental.

All that changed suddenly in 1998, when a routine medical checkup showed a heartbreaking

RIO/A25

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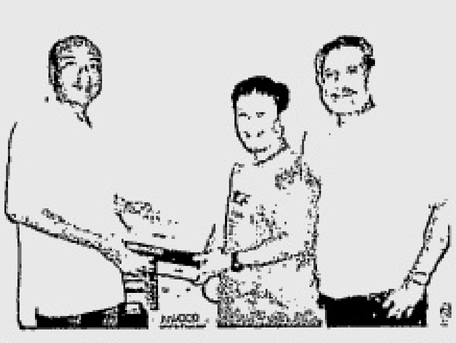
Impossible, you say? Not with Crossover's Crossover Drive radio promo. Where else can you get the chance to win a brand new Kia Sedona while enjoying great music and other nifty Crossover treats such as parties, concerts and exciting games – all these without having to spend a single cent!

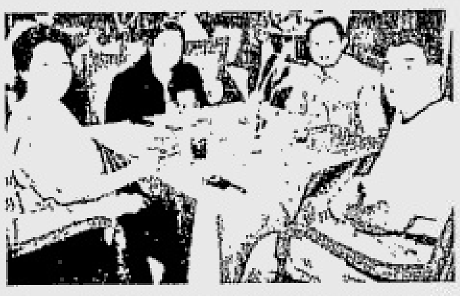
It's Crossover's madcap fete for its ever-growing family of listeners - yuppies, students and busy executives who just can't shake off their daily fix for smooth jazz and R&B. But unlike other radio promos that keep you glued to the radio all day, flood you with all sorts of trivia questions, or send you off on a mailing frenzy, Crossover Drive merely asks its interested participants to drive through any of its stickering events at designated venues in Manila, Cebu, Bacolod or Davao. As each car is tagged with a free Crossover sticker, its owners get to fill out corresponding entry forms which are raffled off in a grand draw. It's that simple.

(From left) Rey Mendoza - Consultant of Communicon Advertising Agency, Girlie Capistrano - Media Director of Communicon, Louie Villar Jr. - President and COO of Crossover, Milagros Mañosca - Grand Prize Winner, Minoru Tanaka - COO of Columbian Autocar Corp., Raymond Gabriel - Finance Manager of Columbian Autocar Corp., Dodie Gañac - Marketing Manager of Columbian Autocar Corp.

Side A's Joey G. performing inside the brand new KIA Sedona during the launch party at Eastwood City Walk, Libis.

The recently-concluded third leg was launched to a crowded pack of young urbanites who danced the night away to Side A's exhilarating grooves at Eastwood City Walk in Libis. As food and drinks flowed through the party, guests scrambled for Crossover stickers and joined in the fun games.


(From left) Louie Villar Jr. - President & COO of Crossover, Joseph Molano - Winner of Kenwood Car Audio System, Ronnie De Asis - VP for Operations of Crossover.


(From left) Milagros Mañosca, Saripaz Villar-Tan - Senior Vice-President for Marketing of Crossover, Larry Fajardo - Account Manager of Crossover, Manny Mañosca at the Serendipity Lounge of Discovery Suites.

(From left) Albert Adriano - President of Communicon Advertising Agency, Louie Villar Jr. - President and COO of Crossover, Minoru Tanaka - COO of Columbian Autocar Corp.

The grand raffle draw, held recently at Hard Rock Café in Makati, was broadcast live. Internet surfers also tuned in via a webcast over www.crossover.com.ph.

The party was highlighted by performances by Jed Maddela, Aliyah Pares and Gail Blanco and Prime Council band. The raffle draw started off with lucky listeners Joseph Molano of Manila, Ricson Antig of Davao, Horace Santibanez of Bacolod and Vinaflor Wugler of Cebu, winning a Kenwood Car Audio System. Crossover President and COO Louie Villar Jr. and Communicon President Albert Adriano assisted Columbian Autocar Corporation COO Minoru Tanaka in picking the winner of the brand new Kia Sedona from a tambiolo full of entries from Cebu, Bacolod, Davao and Manila.

This year's Grand Prize winner, Milagros Mañosca of Greenhills San Juan literally woke up to the good news. "I knew that there was a party at Hard Rock Café for the final draw. I was asleep around midnight when the helper woke me up and said that I had to answer a very important call from a Crossover DJ and that's when I learned that I won the car. I was so excited that I called my relatives to relay the good news – I was awake 'til 4 am."

Jed Maddela entertains the crowd to a soothing blend of contemporary Jazz and R&B.

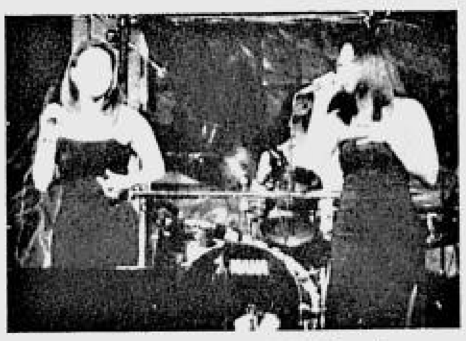
(From left) Minoru Tanaka - COO of Columbian Autocar Corp., Milagros Mañosca - Grand Prize Winner, Louie Villar Jr. - President & COO of Crossover.

The ceremonial awarding of the car keys was held at Discovery Suites' Serendipity Lounge, in a special luncheon hosted by Crossover executives, and joined by representatives from Kia and Communicon Advertising Agency.

Don't be surprised if you hit the road and find yourself tailing a car sporting those Crossover stickers.

So, crank the gas and steer straight ahead in the fast lane while 105.1 Crossover Manila, 90.7 Crossover Cebu, 99.1 Crossover Bacolod, 93.1 Crossover Davao and 105.1 Crossover Baguio pumps up the jazz and shifts to maximum Crossover Drive!

(From left) Ronnie De Asis - VP for Operations of Crossover, Jerome Golez - Marketing Manager of Super Manufacturing Inc., official distributor of Kenwood.


(From left) Aliyah Parcs , Gail Blanco heat up the stage at Hard Rock Café.

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Port operator hikes fees

By Doris C. Dumlao

PORT operator International Container Terminal Services Inc. has secured approval from the Philippine Ports Authority to increase vessel charges at the South Habor and the Manila International Container Terminal by 5 percent starting this month.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday, ICTSI said the PPA had likewise approved a 9-percent increase in vessel charges for next year to be computed against uncompounded 2003 rates such that the 2005 tariffs would be 9 percent over the 2003 rates.

Vessel charges are ship servicing fees such as for docking and wharfage or for the use of port facilities on the basis of tonnage and storage.

ICTSI said it had applied for the rate increases at the MICT to allow ICTSI to cover the increase in its cost of operations due the following adverse factors:

- the depreciation of the Philippine peso against the US dollar and other major currencies;
- the increase in fuel costs and utility charges, and
- the increases in manpower and insurance costs.

ICTSI's concession agreement with the government has a provision for a rate increase, after public hearings, when the rate of increase in fuel cost or government mandated wage adjustments is higher by 10 percent or when the exchange rate of the peso to the dollar deteriorates by more than 10 percent.

The single biggest contributor to PPA revenues remitting about P1.5 billion in fixed and variable fees annually, ICTSI accounts for over 30 percent of the state agency's total income.

The company had tried to freeze its rates over the last two years on moral suasion from Malacañang, compensating it through a reduction in operating costs instead.

BSP policy rates seen unchanged

THE POLICY-MAKING Monetary Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas is expected to keep its key policy interest rates unchanged during its monthly interest rate setting meeting today.

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura yesterday said that monetary authorities could maintain a neutral stance as inflation remained manageable.

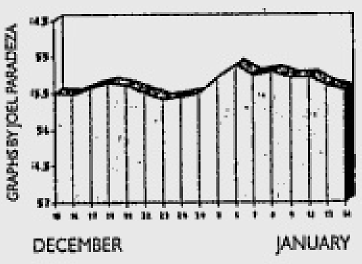
The BSP's key policy rates are at 10-year lows of 6.75 percent for overnight borrowing and 9 percent for overnight lending.

Buenaventura also shrugged off projections by some analysts that the Philippines

BSP/ B2

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES



PESO-DOLLAR RATE

₱ 55.46= $ 1

As of 5 p.m., Jan. 13, 2003

¥ 106.20 = $ 1

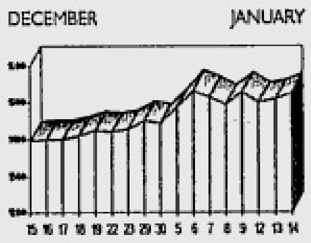
As of 5 p.m., Jan. 14, 2003

GOLD: $422.50-423.00

per ounce Hong Kong, Jan. 14, 2003

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Stocks end 1.2% up on bargain-hunting

STOCKS rose 1.2 percent yesterday, lifted by bargain-hunting on select blue chips led by food and beverage giant San Miguel Corp. and leading conglomerate Ayala Corp.

Analysts said a Supreme Court ruling that a poll automation contract was illegal, which threatened to delay national elections on May 10, might have tempered the market's rise.

The market was kept afloat by rotational buying as some investors took profits on telecom heavyweights PLDT and Globe Telecom, which fueled the market rally at the start of the year.

"Market sentiment at the moment favors the bulls, bolstered by expectations of strong earnings growth for certain blue chips," said RCBC Securities stocks analyst Edwin Gil Mendoza.

The main index ended 18.13 points higher at 1,525.30 points. Value turnover rose to P1.513 billion from Tuesday's P1.14 billion.

Gainers beat losers 35 to 28 and there were 36 stocks unchanged.

"A" shares of San Miguel, Southeast Asia's largest food and beverage firm, rose 50 centavos to P56. Its "B" shares, which are open to foreigners, jumped 3.76 percent or P2.50 to P69.

Ayala Corp., the country's largest conglomerate with interests in telecommunications, property, and banking, finished 3.45 percent or 20 centavos higher at P6.

Analysts said the market would likely drift in the near term as profit-taking on some issues prevented a sharper rise and as players waited for political developments.

"What could hinder any strong market rally would be volatility in other international markets and any political disturbance that could provide more uncertainties over the smooth transition of government after the May polls," Mendoza said.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT), the session's most active share, closed P15 lower at P920.

Globe Telecom Inc., which is jointly owned by Ayala Corp. and Singapore Telecommunications, shed P10 to P900. *Reuters*

INTEREST RATES

January 14, 2004-MART1 Rates

Benchmark Interest Rates	MART1 14-Jan-04	MART1 13-Jan-04
1 Month	6.3875	6.3821
3 Months	6.5214	6.5107
6 Months	7.8804	7.9643
1 Year	8.4554	8.4946
2 Years	9.1717	9.2679
3 Years	10.1117	10.2017
4 Years	10.5617	10.6417
5 Years	10.9077	11.0493
7 Years	11.2768	11.31
10 Years	11.5433	11.555
20 Years	11.9543	11.9589
25 Years	12.2333	12.2393

SOURCE: MART/BLOOMBERG

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Computer litter rate

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Banal III

CAUTION: This report displays the word "computer" explicitly!

The "C" word, based on recent news, to the dismay of the computer literate among us, disturbs the sensibilities of the Supreme Court.

It seems the Supreme Court cannot hold back itself upon hearing the "C" word. This makes the Supreme Court start uncontrollably issuing strongly worded rulings.

Still, this report has nothing to do with any sore loser in any bidding. Thus the Supreme Court does not have to take somebody else's word for it as gospel truth.

It is about debt papers, actually, such as bonds and commercial papers. These are known in the corporate and banking scene as, technically, "fixed income instruments."

Down here in our *barangay*, we also know them simply as IOUs.

Anyway, the scandalous news is, for the trading and safekeeping of such IOUs, they are now also close to starting the use of … well, the "C" word.

* * *

WHERE is this world leading to? At first they wanted to employ the computer for stock trading, for no apparent reason at all, but just to make all that tedious processing fast.

Now they also want to use the computer even for trading and safekeeping of IOUs. Next thing you know, the computer will be elected the President of the Republic.

Heaven help us from all that garbage, because from what I heard, by this July, the computer will be in place to handle the multibillion-peso trading of IOUs.

At first glance, such an aberrant sinful reliance on the convenience and efficiency of the computer may be good for the country.

But if you consider the harsh words which the Supreme Court reserves on the rate at which the computer litters our moral and landscape, you will note that the computer is the work of the devil.

* * *

IT does not help any that various groups in the money-handling business are backing up the project to computerize IOU trading, even putting up the capital for it.

Among the investors in the project are professional associations such as the prestigious BAP and Finex, and the pretentious, *este*, the others *pala*.

Even big local companies like San Miguel invested in what they believe to be a nifty undertaking, something good for the country. In it they put their own money.

Moreover, even rich foreign entities like the World Bank's International Finance Corp. are into it. In it the IFC put the money of other people.

Anyway, foreign and local computer suppliers, for both the hardware and the software, are also putting in their goods as equity.

All in all, anyway, even with a little actual cash changing hands, the project is already certain to raise some P500 million in equity—for starters.

And you'd think that those foolish investors should know better than to advocate the use of the immoral evil computer which, in terms of sinfulness, is on the same ranking as the condom. Hah!

* * *

UNOFFICIALLY known as the "cyber bond exchange," the project was initiated by the BAP. It is therefore being handled by a banker.

That's none other than Vicente Castillo, a.k.a. Teng, who used to be an executive of the Bank of PI, before he became the head of Banco Santander here.

Actually, the BAP's open market committee started dreaming of doing the project some years ago, when it was still headed by a certain Rafael Buenaventura.

Tito Paeng, when he left the BAP to become the Banco Sentral governor, specifically asked Teng to take over the preparation at its various stages.

Teng only found the time when Banco Santander sold its local operations to Banco de Oro. He then went full time on the project.

* * *

ITS idea is to have a one-stop shop for IOU trading, thus making them attractive to the public, taking care of the whole process from trading to clearing, plus the safety.

Those three components are under three different companies, which fall under one holding company, known as the Philippine Dealing System Holdings.

As I said, everything is going to be done with the computer, There is no actual physical exchange. This is definitely a sin.

For one, by April when the safekeeping part of the project starts running, the public can be sure that every IOU which passes through it, well, is the real McCoy.

That is not good for the groups which are making a killing, robbing the public in pyramiding schemes, including the father of the campaign manager of Gloriaetta.

* * *

BY July, the actual "cyber" trading of the IOUs is scheduled to start, and it does so for the first time ever in the history of this scam-prone country.

By then, if you invest in IOUs of private corporations, you can sell them through the exchange when you need money, similar to the stock exchange.

That is also bad. It means that the banks will give up the control on how much price you are going to get for the IOUs in case you need the money in an emergency.

As it is today, when you invest in government bonds, for instance, there is no way for you to convert them into cash unless you go through banks.

And banks, as we call know, are in the business of making money out of everything they do for you.

* * *

IN the end, as I said, the project makes IOUs attractive to the public. Thus the issuers, i.e. the government and private companies, can go directly to them.

Today all the money goes to so-called financial intermediaries, i.e. banks and their cousins, which are all owned by either families or select groups.

And we know how the banks misused a lot of the money, lending to a lot of bad projects, a lot of their loan portfolio now looking uglier than a lot

BREAKTIME/ B3

PUBLIC AUCTION
HMR AUCTION SERVICES, INC.
VIEWING DATE: JANUARY 16, 2004 (FRI) 9:00 AM TO 5:00 PM
AUCTION DATE: JANUARY 17, 2004 (SAT) 10:30 AM
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W/ 85hp Mercury Outboard Motor & Trailer

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Desktops · Scanners · Hubs · Home Theater · CD & DVD Players · Cordless Telephones · Etc.

• INDUSTRIAL ITEMS
Wet & Dry Cement · Rust Primers · Quick Plug Cement · Permalastic Clays · Adhesives · Chemical Additives · US Made Air Filters · Welding Machines · Synthetic Sealants · Ball Bearings · Water Proofing System · Steel Shelving

• KITCHEN & RESTAURANT EQUIPMENT

• OTHER ITEMS
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STATEMENT OF CONDITION
(Head Office and Branches)
As of December 16, 2003

ASSETS

Cash and Cash Items	P	601,591,258.52
Due from Bangko Sentral		423,905,283.51
Due from Other Banks		775,158,537.32
Interbank Loans Receivable		1,200,000,000.00
Trading Account Securities (Net)		227,387,237.70
Investments in Bonds and Other Debt Instruments (Net)		6,343,084,833.20
Loans, Discounts & Advances (Net)		19,607,274,503.77
Equity Investments (Net)		25,000,000.00
Bank Premises, Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (Net)		1,516,666,183.59
Other Assets (Net):		
Property Owned/Acquired		1,823,811,555.57
Others		789,851,255.10
TOTAL ASSETS	P	33,333,730,648.28

LIABILITIES

Demand Deposits	P	780,282,652.48
Savings Deposits		20,844,199,554.58
Time Deposits		6,137,178,962.80
Due to Bangko Sentral		11,832,000.00
Outstanding Checks/Payment Orders		117,904,191.86
Bills Payable:		
BSP-Rediscounts/Special Programs		7,063,675.78
Unearned Income and Other Deferred Credits		40,532,779.01
Other Liabilities		945,212,141.10
TOTAL LIABILITIES	P	28,884,205,957.61

CAPITAL ACCOUNTS

Capital Stock		1,795,015,200.00
Surplus		2,355,273,579.89
Surplus Reserves		299,235,910.78
Appraisal Increment Reserve		
TOTAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTS	P	4,449,524,690.67
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL ACCOUNTS	P	33,333,730,648.28

CONTINGENT ACCOUNTS

Bills for Collection		1,488,166.93
Assets Held Under Trust and Investment Management Agreements		959,261,903.46
Invested in:		
Government Securities		452,385,073.85
Other Securities, Debt Instruments and Shares of Stock		32,881,043.11
Other Assets		473,995,786.50
Accountabilities:		
Trust & Other Fiduciary		150,039,113.73
Common Trust Funds		288,136.57
Investment/Fund Management		808,934,653.16
Other Contingent Accounts		6,006,247.70
TOTAL CONTINGENT ACCOUNTS	P	966,756,318.09

Additional Information:

1. Deposits of	
a) Government	-
b) Banks	19,288,990.65
c) Trust Department	470,449,602.02
2. a. Total Non-Performing Loans	1,200,004,665.02
b. Classified Loans and Other Risk Assets	2,137,872,912.15
c. General Loan Loss Reserve	208,311,808.96
d. Specific Loan Loss Reserve	559,358,923.39
e. Total DOSRI Loans/Advances	1,959,556,073.73
f. Past Due DOSRI Loans Advances	-
g. Ratio of Non-Performing Loans to Total Loan Portfolio	5.23%
h. Ratio of Total DOSRI Loans/Advances to Total Loan Portfolio	8.54%
i. Ratio of Past Due DOSRI to Total Loan Portfolio	-
j. Return on Equity	9.05%

Board of Directors

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Senior Vice President

Jaime V. L. Araneta
Senior Vice President

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
Makati City) S.S.

We, NOLI S. GOMEZ and PASCUAL M. GARCIA, III of the above-mentioned bank do solemnly swear that all matters set forth in the above statement of condition are true and correct to the best of our knowledge and belief.

(Sgd) NOLI S. GOMEZ
First Vice President

(Sgd) PASCUAL M. GARCIA, III
President

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me this January 12, 2004, affiant exhibiting to me their Community Tax Certificates No. 132080502 issued at Manila on 15 January 2003 and No. 154886212 issued at Quezon City on 28 January 2003.

Doc. No. 345
Book No. 70
Page No. IV
Series of 2004

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PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of January 14, 2004)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	4	4	4	4	34,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	18.25	18.5	18.25	18.25	426,800
Bank of the Phil. Islands	50	51.5	50	51.5	1,055,200
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	38.5	43	38.5	43	1,850,700
Export and Ind. Bank Inc	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.54	50,000
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	28.5	29	28.5	28.5	1,064,000
Philippine National Bank	24	24.25	24	24.25	85,100
Phil. Savings Bank	26.5	26.5	26	26.5	12,000
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	13	13	13	13	5,000
Security Bank Corp.	17.25	17.5	17.25	17.5	9,900
Union Bank of the Phil.	28.5	29	28.5	28.5	11,600
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
ATR Kim Eng Fin. Corp.	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	100,000
Bankard Inc.	1.16	1.16	1.14	1.16	57,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1850	1850	1850	1850	100
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	100,000
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1420	1435	1420	1435	2,640
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	27	27	26.5	26.5	29,500
Digital Telecom Phils. Inc.	0.76	0.76	0.75	0.75	3,050,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	910	915	895	900	117,820
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.045	0.045	0.043	0.043	2,900,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.039	0.04	0.039	0.04	300,000
Liberty Telecoms Holdings	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	70,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	1.26	1.32	1.22	1.26	33,147,000
Phil. Telegraph & Tel. Co	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	60,000
Transpacific Broadcast	1.38	1.38	1.38	1.38	25,000
Phil Long Dis Tel Co.	945	960	920	920	416,100
Philweb Corp.	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.012	22,200,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	21.75	21.75	20.5	21.75	1,046,700
Manila Electric Co. B	37	37	34.5	34.5	3,760,300
Petron Corp.	2.55	2.65	2.5	2.5	9,548,000
Salcon Power Corp.	2.2	2.4	2.2	2.4	21,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.28	1.28	1.28	1.28	3,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4	276,000
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	20,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.32	0.32	0.3	0.3	1,130,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp.	1.52	1.52	1.5	1.5	70,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1	54,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	30	30	29	29.5	195,300
Jollibee Foods Corp.	19.5	21.5	19.5	21.25	361,100
Swift Food Inc.	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.24	20,000
San Miguel Corp. A	55	56.5	55	56	3,137,000
San Miguel Corp. B	67	69.5	67	69	1,054,000
Phil Tob Flue Cur & Redry	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	30,000
Universal Robina Corp.	5.9	6	5.9	6	44,000
Vitarich Corp.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	190,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Ayala Corp.	5.7	6.1	5.7	6	15,969,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.5	3.55	3.5	3.55	211,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.026	0.026	0.026	0.026	500,000
A. Soriano Corp.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	50,000
APC Group Inc.	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.06	600,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.006	0.006	0.0055	0.0055	12,000,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	60,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	9	9.9	9	9.9	19,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.67	0.7	0.66	0.68	28,140,000
Basic Consolidated Inc.	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	200,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.205	0.205	0.2	0.2	330,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	1,100,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	1.04	1.04	1	1	140,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	24.5	26	24	26	2,312,000
Global Business Hldgs Inc.	51	55	45	55	2,500
Global Equities Inc.	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	1,900,000
Ionics Inc.	1.62	1.76	1.62	1.76	687,000
Macroasia Corp.	0.58	0.58	0.55	0.55	300,000
Megaworld Corporation	1.1	1.16	1.08	1.16	4,114,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.3	0.33	0.3	0.33	38,640,000
Music Corp.	0.37	0.37	0.36	0.37	1,200,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp.	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	200,000
SPI Technologies Inc.	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	7,500
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Metro Alliance Holdings	0.9	0.95	0.9	0.95	50,000
Metro Alliance Hldgs B	0.89	0.89	0.89	0.89	10,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.54	0.55	0.54	0.55	2,080,000
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	10,000
Manila Jockey Club	11.5	11.5	11.5	11.5	2,000
Mondragon Intl Phils. Inc.	0.15	0.19	0.15	0.18	290,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	27	27	26	26	591,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series R	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	200
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	100
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.2	7,123,000
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	210,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	1,000,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.215	0.225	0.215	0.225	3,270,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.18	30,983,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	30,000
Keppel Phils. Prop. Inc.	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79	200,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	20,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	450,000
SM Development Corp.	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	131,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.2	6.3	9,582,000
MINING					
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.99	10,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22	1,500,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.0075	0.008	0.0075	0.0075	29,000,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	5,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003	6,000,000
Polar Mines & Dev't Corp.	0.018	0.018	0.018	0.018	100,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.43	0.43	0.42	0.42	310,000
OIL					
Imperial Res.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	2,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	25,000,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.018	0.018	0.015	0.016	72,200,000
Vulcan Ind'l	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	500,000

DISCLOSURES

JOLLIBEE Foods Corp. clarified reports that its profit jumped 17 percent last year. The figure reflects its net income for the first nine months of 2003.

* * *

THE CHANGE of **Lodestar Mining Corp.'s** name to **Lodestar Investment Holdings Corp.**, along with the change in its industry classification from mining to holding firm, will be reflected in the Philippine Stock Exchange Inc.'s computer system on Jan. 15.

* * *

IN LINE with **Interphil Laboratories Inc.**'s share buy-back program, the company bought 225,000 ILI shares at P1.90 per share on Jan. 13.

* * *

PCI Leasing and Finance Inc. bought 50,000 of its shares at P1.32 per share on Jan. 13 as part of its shares buy-back program.

* * *

MARTIN O'Neil was appointed chief financial advisor of International Container Terminal Services Inc. and senior vice president and CFO of ICTSI Ltd., a fully owned subsidiary of ICTSI.

* * *

UNIVERSAL Rightfield Property Holdings Inc. received on Jan. 13 a copy of the petition for corporate rehabilitation filed by one of its creditors, D. M. Consunji Inc.

Compiled by Armin Adina, PDI Research

CURRENCIES

January 14, 2004 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.783147	1.000000	55.3410
Japan	Yen	0.007373	0.009414	0.5210
United Kingdom	Pound	1.446315	1.846800	102.2038
Hongkong	Dollar	0.100877	0.128810	7.1285
Switzerland	Franc	0.641293	0.818867	45.3169
Canada	Dollar	0.616360	0.787030	43.5550
Singapore	Dollar	0.462170	0.590145	32.6592
Australia	Dollar	0.609690	0.778513	43.0837
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.077423	2.652661	146.8009
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.208839	0.266667	14.7576
Brunei	Dollar	0.460810	0.588408	32.5631
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000094	0.000120	0.0066
Thailand	Baht	0.020153	0.025733	1.4241
UAE	Dirham	0.213223	0.272264	15.0674
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.276900	70.6649
Argentina	Peso	0.273827	0.349650	19.3500
Brazil	Real	0.279293	0.356633	19.7364
Denmark	Kroner	0.134250	0.171424	9.4868
India	Rupee	0.017250	0.022026	1.2189
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.206119	0.263193	14.5654
Mexico	New Peso	0.072179	0.092166	5.1006
New Zealand	Dollar	0.534571	0.682594	37.7754
Norway	Kroner	0.116717	0.149036	8.2478
Pakistan	Rupee	0.013620	0.017391	0.9624
South Africa	Rand	0.113664	0.145138	8.0321
Korea	Won	0.000663	0.000847	0.0469
Sweden	Kroner	0.109388	0.139678	7.7299
Syria	Pound	0.015206	0.019417	1.0746
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023322	0.029780	1.6481
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000491	0.000627	0.0347

BSP policy rates …

From page B1

might buck the trend of interest rate downtrend this year due to pressures from currency volatility.

"I don't think that's the case because if you look at interest spreads versus the US dollar, there is every indication that the US, if its interest rates have to go up in the second half, those will be very minimal," Buenaventura said.

"A 25-basis point (increase by the US Federal Reserve) will not trigger any change on our part unless inflationary pressures come in," he said.

Doris C. Dumlao

MANAGING LENDING RISKS

BSP to initiate creation of central credit bureau

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas is seeking a legal mandate to spearhead the creation of a centralized credit bureau, which is deemed crucial in helping banks manage lending risks.

In an interview yesterday, BSP Deputy Governor for bank supervision and examination Alberto Reyes said the BSP had commissioned a group of lawyers to study whether it could take the lead role in establishing a national credit bureau that would allow data-sharing among banks.

The BSP has been prodding the Bankers Association of the Philippines to spearhead this reform, but the group has yet to act on it. It has given the banking sector until this year to initiate the creation of the credit bureau, otherwise the BSP said it would spearhead the move itself and impose stricter regulations.

"We are now looking at whether we can do it without any new legislation," Reyes said.

Reyes said the BSP was ready to push for a legislation—whether an amendment to its charter or a new law—to obtain a mandate to spearhead a central credit bureau. This, however, might take the BSP a long time before it could actually implement the plan.

Reyes said the creation of a centralized credit bureau was tied to the reforms being undertaken by the BSP to boost the benchmarks for capital adequacy in line with the standards of Basle-based Bank for International Settlements.

The BSP is pushing for the creation of a central credit bureau to enhance the monitoring of credit risks using a central database that will boost the monitoring of banks' credit exposures.

To date, the BAP has a data-sharing facility which, however, includes only information on delinquent borrowers. In general, banks are still hesitant to share information on good borrowers with their peers as they feel this will reduce their competitive edge.

Reyes said a central credit bureau would help the BSP in implementing Basle-based internal rating approaches.

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Block 2	7	201 sqm	74 sqm	P 4,500,000	P 1,350,000	P 3,150,000
	House & Lot, 3-BR / 3 TB, 2-storey attic					
Block 2	12	193 sqm	112 sqm	P 4,900,000	P 1,470,000	P 3,430,000
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Bids must be accompanied by P 5,000 cash or MC. Call, 834-6840 to 41 or 0927-3300-532 for details.

Apec members urged to work as a bloc

By Michelle V. Remo

ASIA-PACIFIC Economic Cooperation member-economies should work as a bloc in pursuing the stalled multilateral trade talks under the World Trade Organization.

Hernan Somersville, chair of the Apec Business Advisory Council (Abac), said it was about time that countries in the Asia-Pacific region participate in multilateral trade negotiations as a caucus and with a common objective of fulfilling the principles of the WTO.

"Apec should play a crucial role in the WTO. We may be able to achieve something if Apec endorses this multilateral trade negotiations," he said in a press briefing yesterday.

Somersville, who is in the country to meet with President Macapagal-Arroyo and her economic team, said he was set to meet with government officials in various countries in the Asia-Pacific to convince them to support the agenda of Abac.

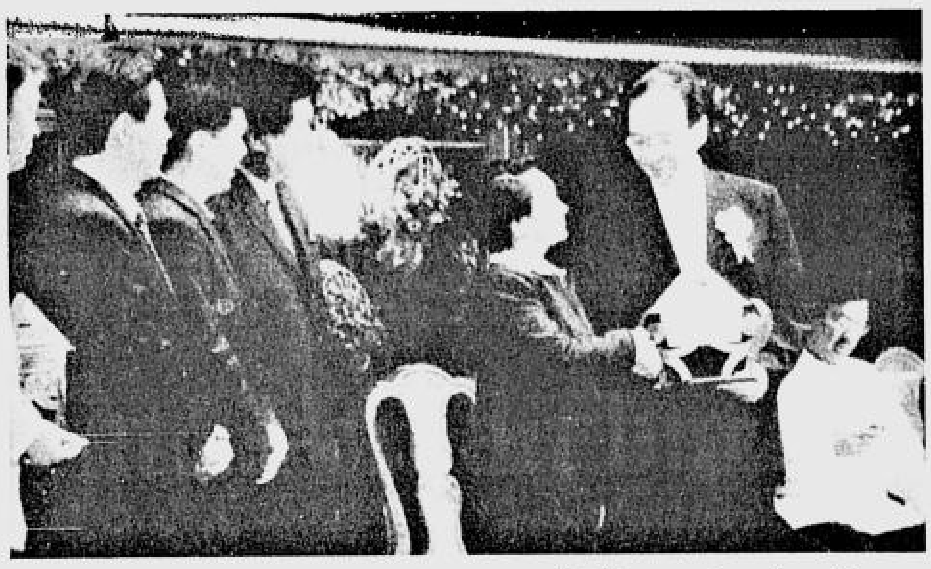
He said Abac would focus this year on addressing five major issues: Helping move the WTO Doha Development Agenda forward; analyzing how bilateral trade agreements within the region could affect the principles of a multilateral trading system; coping with the new challenges of trade and investment; strengthening the financial systems in the Apec region and building capacity to face the challenges of globalization.

Abac is the unit of Apec that is tasked to provide consultation for government and economic leaders with the aim of pushing for the goals of a fair and free trade.

Saying bilateral trade agreements could affect the success of the multilateral trade system, Somersville said. Abac was bent on finding out ways to make the bilateral deals conform with the objectives of the WTO.

After the failure of the WTO Cancun round of talks in September 2003, some countries like the Philippines began crafting bilateral trade deals, thinking the multilateral trading system will not prosper anytime soon.

But Somersville said it was crucial for countries to keep their faith in the multilateral trading system because it would be more beneficial than bilateral arrangements.



President GMA awards the
" 2003 Leading Condominium Developer of the Year"

Cityland Development Corporation, represented by its President, Dr. Andrew I. Liuson was recently awarded the 2003 Leading Condominium Developer of the Year by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at Heroes Hall in Malacañang.

As shown in the picture, other officials who witnessed the awarding rites are from left: Armando de Castro, Secretary General of HUDCC; Romulo Q. Fabul, HLURB Commissioner & CEO; Mike T. Defensor, Chairman & Secretary of HUDCC; Congressman Prospero Nograles, Chairman, Housing Committee; Her Excellency, Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo; and Dr. Andrew I. Liuson, President of Cityland Development Corporation.

Known as the company that builds the "In God We Trust" buildings, Cityland through its consistent track record in the delivery and completion of all its condominiums contributed to the promotion of economic development and progress which helped in creating a stable nation.

Whether in good times or in bad, for 25 years of God's grace they continue to build and provide affordable condominium units in Wack Wack, Shaw Boulevard, Ortigas in Mandaluyong, Pasig and Makati City not only as an excellent investment opportunity but also as affordable housing - their simple way of showing a genuine concern for the betterment of Filipino lives.

Cityland attributes its success to God and the men who unselfishly share thier expertise, starting with its Chairman Dr. Washington Sycip, Vicente Paterno, former Senator and former Chairman, Stephen Roxas, Chairman of Cityland Inc. and Executive Committee and Atty. Sabino Padilla,Jr., Chairman of City and Land Developers, Inc.

Giving honor and glory to God, the Cityland Group of Companies humbly illuminates on all its buildings the sign "IN GOD WE TRUST."

The awarding rites is in line with the 1st Kabalikat sa Pabahay Awards 2003. It is in recognition of the efforts, combined energies and resources of government, the private sector and civil society, a way of fulfilling the Filipino dream of owning a home.

ADVT

Breaktime

From page B2

of the recent Supreme Court rulings.

Thus the banking system can hardly afford to make out new loans. Last year, for instance, the banking system increased its loans by a pathetic 3 percent.

The reason is clear, and it is because the banks did not and still do not have enough capital. Whatever capital they have now is tied up to the bad loans.

* * *

AS a result, local borrowers must go abroad. Recently, the local firms with the best of the best credit ratings, namely, San Miguel and Ayala, had to go abroad to float bonds. Even the government must always tap the foreign market.

And they cannot do it here, not as yet, because there are no buyers of the bonds, simply because there is no way, no mechanism, to determine even a simple thing as the market pricing.

Yet we have an aristocracy which control most of the wealth of this country and which invest their money abroad through "private" bankers, because we don't have a capital market to start with.

This new computer project can change all that. This is immoral. How can the rich now justify sending their money abroad?

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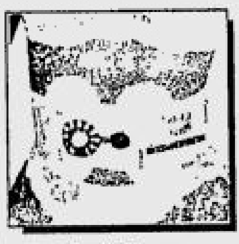

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One (1) Legislative Staff Officer III (Canvasser) SG 19-1 Item#92 Q.S.: Bachelor's degree relevant to the job, One (1) year relevant experience, Four (4) hours of relevant training and Career Service Professional eligible. One (1) Supervising Legislative Staff Officer II (Section Chief, Cash) SG 24-1 Item#96 Q.S.: Bachelor's degree relevant to the job, Four (4) years of relevant experience, Twenty-four (24) hours of relevant training and Career Service Professional eligible. Send Comprehensive Resume' with 2x2 colored picture to: Commission on Appointments, 6F PNB Financial Center, Pres. Diosdado Macapagal Blvd., Pasay City

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East Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City
Visit the SSS website for Bid Invitations

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY & TO BID

BULK PURCHASE OF SUPPLIES & MATERIALS, CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT & SSS EMPLOYEES' UNIFORMS

The SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM is inviting bidders for the following

1. Bulk purchase of supplies and materials requirements for the first semester of CY 2004
Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC)
    - Paper & Paper Products – P 8,518,507.60
    - Computer Supplies – P 3,810,490.00
    - Printed Forms – P 4,670,144.40
    - Various Supplies – P 303,869.20

   Total ABC P17,303,011.20
   Source of Funding Supplies & Materials
   Contract Duration Staggered delivery but not to exceed six (6) months
2. Project Supervision of the proposed construction of the SSS Cebu Branch Building project.
   Approved Budget for the Contract P1,352,000.00 or 1.6% of the Actual Construction Bidded Cost
   Source of Funding Capital Expenditures – Building Construction
   Contract Duration (including pre-construction & post construction stage) Seventeen (17) months
   Prospective Construction Management Firm should have ten (10) years of experience on projects that are similar in nature to the contract to be bidded
   The criteria to be used in the short-listing of Consultants and evaluation of bids shall be in accordance with the Implementing Rules & Regulations (IRR) of RA 9184 and NEDA Guidelines for the Procurement of Consulting Services
   The detailed evaluation of bids shall be based on the quality-based procedure
3. Design and supply of materials for the SSS Employees' Uniforms for Fiscal Year 2004-2005, with the following specifications

RANK & FILE EMPLOYEES	
MALE	FEMALE
1 Filipiniana Attire w/ Matching Pants	1 Filipiniana Attire w/ Matching Skirt or Pants
1 Polo Barong w/ Matching Pants	3 Blouses w/ Matching Skirts Pants & Blazers
1 Trubenized Shirt w/ Matching Pants & Neck Tie	1 Pin with Official SSS Logo
1 Short Sleeve Polo w/ Matching Pants	
1 Pin with Official SSS Logo	

EXECUTIVES	
MALE	FEMALE
1 Filipiniana Attire w/ Matching Pants	1 Filipiniana Attire w/ Matching Skirt or Pants
1 Long Sleeve Polo w/ Matching Pants	2 Blouses w/ Matching Skirts & Blazers
1 Business Suit (3-piece)	1 Business Suit (3-piece)
1 Short Sleeve Polo w/ Matching Pants	1 Pin with Official SSS Logo
1 Pin with Official SSS Logo	

- Proposal shall cover all sets for any employee gender or both
- Materials should pass the PTRI standards for uniforms, proofs of which is required to be submitted together with the prototype
- Materials should bear the SSS corporate color of royal blue, yellow or the corresponding shades

Approved Budget for the Contract
- MALE (1,478 Employees) P4,460,500.00
- FEMALE (2,548 Employees) P7,686,000.00

Source of Funding Operational Expenditures (Clothing Allowance)
* Contract of Duration One Hundred Twenty (120) calendar days

The detailed evaluation of bids shall be on quality-based selection process

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES		
Particulars	Date	Venue
Issuance of Eligibility requirements	Jan 15 to 28 2004	BAC Secretariat 6th Flr., SSS Main Bldg
Deadline of submission of eligibility requirements • Bulk Purchase of Supplies & Materials • Construction Management • SSS Employees Uniforms	February 02, 2004 February 03, 2004 February 04, 2004	BAC Secretariat 6th Flr., SSS Main Bldg
Issuance of Bidding Documents to Eligible Bidders upon payment of a non-refundable fee as follows Item # 1 – Paper & Paper Products – P5,000.00 – Computer Supplies – P1,000.00 – Printed Forms – P1,000.00 – Various Supplies – P500.00 Item # 2 – P500.00 Item # 3 – P5,000.00	February 05, 2004 February 06, 2004 February 09, 2004	BAC Secretariat 6th Flr., SSS Main Bldg
Pre-bid Conference • Bulk Purchase of Supplies & Materials • Construction Management • SSS Employees' Uniforms	February 06, 2004 2:00 p.m February 09, 2004 2:00 p.m February 10, 2004 2:00 p.m	Bidding Room 6th Flr., SSS Main Building
Submission & Opening of Bids shall be announced and confirmed through a Bid Bulletin		

This bidding shall be governed by the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 9184, otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act"

For any inquiry, please call telephone numbers 922-2991 or 920-6401 local 5490/5401.

The SSS reserves the right to reject any or all bids without offering any reason, to waive any formality or technicality, and to award to any bidder whose proposal is deemed most advantageous to the SSS. The SSS neither assumes any obligation for any loss whatsoever that may be incurred by the bidders in the preparation of their respective bids, nor does the SSS guarantee that an award will be made

(Sgd.) THE CHAIRMAN
BIDS & AWARDS COMMITTEE

(PDI – January 15, 2004)

AUCTION
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10:30AM SATURDAY 17th JANUARY 2004
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"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

John 14:6

CARIDAD G. SISON

of Manaoag, Pangasinan

Died in the Grace of our Lord
on January 10, 2004 at the age of 90.

Her loving children
- **Bella** and **Conrado**
- **Lede** and **Ramiro Jr.**
  - **Tony** and **Cris**
- **Ricardo**
  - **Karina**
  - **Cristina** and **Al - Angelo, Angela**
  - **Caridad** and **Allan - Annie**
  - **Mark**
  - **Agnes**
- **Caridad**
- **Miriam** and **Rocky**
  - **Louella** and **Carmine**
  - **Ramiro III** and **Daniela**
  - **Lyn** and **Simone - Baby Miriam**

Her remains lie in state at Family residence in Manaoag, Pangasinan.

Interment will be at Manaoag Catholic Cemetery, Saturday, January 17, 2004 after the 1:30 p.m. Mass at the Shrine of Our Lady of Manaoag.

ENRIQUE V. ICASIANO

who peacefully joined his Creator on Tuesday, January 13, 2004 at the age of 102.

His remains lie in state at La Funeraria Paz, Araneta Ave., Quezon City.

Interment will be on January 18, 2004 at North Cemetery after the 9:00 a.m. Holy Mass at La Funeraria Paz.

MESSAGE OF THANKS

We, the family of the late,

ATTY. SIDRITO V. RAMIRO

sincerely convey our deepest gratitude and appreciation to all who offered Masses and prayers, sent flowers and messages of sympathy, gave donations, visited and kept vigil, attended funeral rites and days of prayer, and who, in countless and immeasurable ways condoled with and comforted us in our time of grief.

MARAMING SALAMAT PO.

GRACIA TEVES LOCSIN

Peacefully joined her Creator
On January 13, 2004 at the age of 85.

Her children **Gogot** and **Nena Dominado**, **Gloria** and **Paco Alcuaz**, **Meda** and **Chito Planas**, **Mike** (†) and **Lyn dela Rea Dominado**, her grandchildren, and great grandchildren, brother **Tuting Locsin** and sister **Luz Jovellanos** request friends to pray for a good woman's repose.

Her remains will be interred today at Mount Carmel Crypt, Doña Juana Rodriguez Ave., New Manila, Quezon City, following a Mass at 12:00 noon.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."
John 3:16

ATTY. TEOTIMO SAGA AGUILAR

Peacefully joined our Lord on the 12th of January, 2004 at the age of 85.

His loving children **Romy**, **Jek** and **Theo**; grandchildren **Angel**, **Lala** and **Cacai**; brother **Loloy** and sister **Luming**; relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at La Funeraria Paz, Araneta Ave., Quezon City.

Interment will be on Saturday, 2:00 p.m., January 17, 2004 at Himlayang Pilipino after the 10:00 a.m. Mass at La Funeraria Paz.

DEATH NOTICE

RICARDO J. REYES

Passed away on January 10, 2004 at the age of 49.

His remains lie in state at family residence in Sto. Cristo Sur, Gapan, Nueva Ecija.

Interment will be on Saturday, January 17, 2004 at Memorial Garden, Gapan Nueva Ecija after the 9:00 a.m. Mass at Sto. Cristo Sur Church, Gapan, Nueva Ecija.

An obituary with a picture can be a fitting tribute to your departed loved one.
Always caring... INQUIRER OBITUARIES

OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS:
❶ Copy of Death Certificate; ❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT • MESSAGE OF THANKS • DEATH ANNIVERSARY • REQUIEMS • FREE OBIT DESIGN

ANNOUNCEMENT

COL. HOSPICIO B. TUAZON (Ret.) PMA '40

May 21, 1916 – January 12, 2004

His remains lie in state at the Nacional Memorial Homes, Chapel 2-B, G. Araneta Ave., Quezon City.

Necrological services will be after the 9:00 a.m. Mass on Saturday, January 17, 2004 at the Camp Crame Chapel.

Interment will thereafter be at 12:00 noon at the Libingan ng mga Bayani, Fort Bonifacio, Makati.

GUILLERMA E. ALARCÓN

of Obando, Bulacan
was called home to the Lord on Tuesday, 13 January, 2004
at the age of 90

Her loving children **IGNACIO** and **NATIVIDAD**, **WILFREDO** and **MA. LUISA**, **SIMEON** and **ANITA**, **RAMON** and **ROSARIO** (†), **ALEXANDER** and **VIRGINIA**; grandchildren **Jimble & Jennifer**, **Louis**, **Yazmynn** and **Celine**, **Rowland**, **Maileen & Joseph**, and **Jenny**, **Jon**, **Ryan** and **Rea**, and **Maica**; great grandchildren and relatives request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at the family residence at 47 Panghulo, Obando, Bulacan.

Interment will be on Saturday, January 17, 2004 at the Obando Catholic Cemetery, after the 1:00 p.m. Mass at San Pascual Baylon Church, Obando, Bulacan.

CLASSIFIEDS

PHILIPPINE 2000

Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT
Bids and Awards Committee

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

KALAHI-CIDSS PROJECT
NATIONAL HYDROGEOLOGIST

The Government of the Philippines has received a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development toward the cost of the **Kapit-Bisig Laban Sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services Project (KALAHI-CIDSS)**, and intends to apply part of the proceeds of this loan to eligible payment of professional services under this Contract.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development which is the lead implementing agency for this flagship project of the government in fighting poverty now invites Individual Consultant for the hiring of KALAHI-CIDSS National Hydrogeologist.

The Contracting Agent shall provide technical assistance in the implementation of community water supply projects in KALAHI-CIDSS areas. Technical assistance shall include specialized advice to implementers, development of guidelines and instructional implementor's reference materials, training implementers and staff of the LGU partners, report preparation, monitoring and assessment of technical capacity and implementation of projects in the field.

Applicants must possess the following qualifications:

1. Hydrogeologist with four (4) years minimum relevant work experience, knowledgeable on ground water related projects, or a civil engineer with four (4) years minimum relevant work experience on community water supply projects, trained on hydrology (preferably formal training or schooling) and knowledgeable on ground water-related projects.
2. With relevant experience in water supply project implementation involving communities in poverty areas.
3. Can relate with and impart knowledge and skills to KALAHI-CIDSS community volunteers.
4. Skilled in computer operation with some knowledge on softwares related to community water supply system design.
5. With proficient skills in writing, report preparation and presentation.
6. Skilled in computer operation involving word processing, spreadsheet, presentation and other related softwares.
7. Experience in foreign-assisted projects is an advantage.

Interested Proponents may submit their **Application Letters and Comprehensive Resumé** to the **Bids and Awards Committee Secretariat** at 2nd floor, DSWD, Batasan Pambansa Complex, Constitution Hills, Quezon City with telephone numbers: 951-71-16 until **January 28, 2004 at 5:00 PM.**

(Sgd.) RHODA F. YAP
Assistant Secretary and Chairperson,
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI – January 15 & 22, 2004)

PHILIPPINE 2000

Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT
Bids and Awards Committee

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

KALAHI-CIDSS PROJECT
COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE SPECIALIST

The Government of the Philippines has received a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development toward the cost of the **Kapit-Bisig Laban Sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services Project (KALAHI-CIDSS)**, and intends to apply part of the proceeds of this loan to eligible payment of professional services under this Contract.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development which is the lead implementing agency for this flagship project of the government in fighting poverty now invites Individual Consultant for the hiring of KALAHI-CIDSS Community Infrastructure Operations & Maintenance Specialist.

The Contracting Agent shall provide technical assistance on operation and maintenance of small infrastructure projects and common service facilities managed by communities/barangays in KALAHI-CIDSS areas. Technical assistance shall include specialized advice to implementers, development of guidelines and instructional implementors' reference materials, training implementers and staff of LGU partners, reports preparation, monitoring and assessment of technical capacity and implementation of projects in the field.

Applicants must possess the following qualifications:

1. Civil engineer with four (4) years minimum relevant experience, thorough and extensive knowledge on operation and maintenance of small-scale infrastructure projects managed by communities and barangays.
2. Preferably with a master's degree in a related field.
3. With relevant experience in project implementation involving communities in poverty areas.
4. With proficient writing and verbal skills essential in report preparation, presentation and conduct of training for implementers and community volunteers.
5. Skilled in computer operation involving word processing, spreadsheet, presentation and other related softwares.
7. Experience in foreign-assisted projects is an advantage.

Interested Proponents may submit their **Application Letters and Comprehensive Resumé** to the **Bids and Awards Committee Secretariat** at 2nd floor, DSWD, Batasan Pambansa Complex, Constitution Hills, Quezon City with telephone numbers: 951-71-16 until **January 28, 2004 at 5:00 PM.**

(Sgd.) RHODA F. YAP
Assistant Secretary and Chairperson,
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI – January 15 & 22, 2004)

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

NOTICE TO DEPOSITORS OF THE CLOSED RURAL BANK OF STO. DOMINGO (ALBAY), INC.

1. Starting January 15, 2004, the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) thru its duly authorized representatives shall receive claims for insured deposits maintained with the closed Rural Bank of Sto. Domingo (Albay), Inc.
2. Depositors are requested to proceed directly to the premises of the said closed bank from January 15 to February 5, 2004, to file claims for insured deposits.

   PDIC representatives are stationed at the premises of the closed bank on the above cited dates to accept claims and entertain queries of depositors during office hours, Monday to Friday.

   After the said dates, all depositors can file their claims personally at the PDIC Office from Monday to Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., or by mail addressed to-

   The Manager
   Claims Processing Department
   Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation
   2228 Chino Roces Avenue
   1231 Makati City

3. Depositors are advised to present the following requirements to the PDIC representatives when filing their claims:
   a. Original evidence of deposit such as Savings Passbook and/or Certificate of Time Deposits.
   b. Latest identification documents (ID) bearing the depositor's signature.

   Other documents maybe required by the PDIC representatives in the course of their processing of claims filed.

4. Pursuant to the provision of R.A. 3591, as amended, the prescriptive date (last day) for filing of claims for insured deposits in the closed Rural Bank of Sto. Domingo (Albay), Inc. is on **July 02, 2005**. After **July 02, 2005**, PDIC as insurer, shall no longer accept any claim for insured deposits maintained with the said closed bank.

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

(PDI–Jan. 14 & 15, 2004)

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Editor Aries Espinosa

Nigel Gilbert named regional president of Lowe Asia-Pacific

NIGEL Gilbert, currently the worldwide account director on HSBC at Lowe & Partners Worldwide in London, has been promoted to regional president of Lowe's Asia-Pacific network, effective January 2004.

Gilbert will succeed Ian Creasey in Singapore, who is relocating to London to assume his new position as regional president for Europe/Middle East/Africa early in the New Year, as previously announced.

Peter Zillig, who until two months ago was serving as the regional account director on Lowe's global Braun business run out of London, will become the new worldwide account director on HSBC. Zillig will remain based at Lowe London.

"Nigel is ideally suited for his new role; not only does he have a great deal of experience managing regional and global accounts, he's already worked in the region for several years. He understands the complexities of managing people and accounts across borders, and he already has a deep respect and appreciation for the rapidly evolving advertising industry across the vast Asia-Pacific region," said Jerry Judge, chief executive officer of Lowe & Partners Worldwide, "As for Pete, his international experience on both the client and agency side make him ideally suited for the global role on HSBC, I'm sure he will do a fantastic job."

"Taking on a new job is an exciting proposition for anyone," said Ian Creasey. "Still I will miss the many relationships I've formed here in Asia, but I take a great deal of pride in being a part of all that Lowe has accomplished across this region over the past few years. I'm pleased to be handling over management of the region to Nigel's sure and steady hands. I am certain the business will go from strength to strength."

Nigel Gilbert began his advertising career in the media department at Allen Brady & Marsh (which was later absorbed into the Lowe Group). He then spent 10 years at Collett Dickenson Pearce in London, where he eventually rose to director of European operations and worked closely with Japanese equity partner Dentsu.

In 1993, he joined Dentsu, Young & Rubicam, where he managed their agency in Hong Kong for three years and led successful regional pitches for clients such as AT&T and Shell in China.

He moved to Stockholm in 1996 with Young & Rubicam to manage the agency's global Ericsson Mobile Communications account. Two years later he returned to London, where he joined Lowe & Partners Worldwide. In early 1999, he led Lowe's successful global pitch for HSBC and has managed the relationship ever since.

What began as a global project to establish the newly unified HSBC brand became an opportunity for Lowe to pitch against incumbent agencies for the local account in each HSBC market around the world. Lowe is now sole or lead agency in almost every key market. The Lowe-devised positioning, "HSBC - The world's local bank," is widely admired - this year the bank has been named as Asia's most successful brand and debuted at no. 37 on Interbrand's Top 100 Global Brands ranking.

"Helping to build the HSBC brand globally, as well as Lowe's relationship with HSBC, has been a career highlight for me," said Gilbert. "I am pleased that HSBC is a major Lowe client in Asia and that my involvement with this important client will continue, albeit in a different role. And I'm truly looking forward to further building upon the momentum Ian has created for Lowe in the region."

GINEBRA PROMO WINNER

Roque Hereco (third from left) of Cainta, Rizal is the first major prize winner of Ginebra San Miguel Inc's (GSMI) on-going 'Milyun-milyung Yaman sa Tansan' promo. He will bring home a brand new Jianshe motorbike. Milyun-milyong Yaman sa Tansan' is GSMI's biggest under-the-crown promo in recent years where, in addition to motorbikes, Ginebra drinkers can also win instant prizes such as color TVs, electric fans, t-shirts and bull caps. Handing the prize is Nelson Elises, GSMI sales manager for the Greater Manila Area. Witnessing the turnover are (from left): Juancho Escalambre, GSMI district sales supervisor for Central Manila; Jojo Espora, Hereco's cousin; Tom Gaerlan, GSMI territory sales manager for Central Manila; Romel Santos, Jianshe Motors representative; and Jamby Caldo, GSMI brand manager.

Singapore's Palm Beach Restaurant now in Manila

PALM Beach Singapore Restaurant, one of Singapore's finest seafood restaurant since 1956 has finally opened its first franchise in the Philippines last December.

The restaurant's cozy but friendly design, which can seat 200 people, has the perfect ambiance and total elegance that will surely set the standard for fine dining.

"Palm Beach will serve not only the finest quality food that is exquisitely prepared, but also in generous helpings. This is as good as it gets... the perfect combination of quality, quantity and affordable prices," said Vincent Cheng, managing director of Palm Beach Restaurant Philippines, the master franchise holder of Palm Beach Singapore.

Among Palm Beach's finest specialties are Chili Crab, Black Sauce Prawns, Honey Tangy Fish, Lobster Claypot on Coco Stock, Sambal Crayfish, Drunken Prawns, Hainanese Chicken, Mee Gorang, Black Pepper Beef, and Palm Beach Special Soup among many other mouth-watering dishes.

"The restaurant has now earned a reputation purely by word of mouth and it has gained an avid following that has continued to increase year after year from all over Asia. Our chefs, our managers, our flavors and spices are all from Singapore and Malaysia because we want to ensure that the best quality and services are available to our customers," added Cheng.

Over the years, through sheer determination and zeal, combined with the irresistible force of entrepreneurship, Palm Beach is today a visible dynamic identity that is instantly recognizable - from its modern logo to its dedicated staff.

Visit the Palm Beach Singapore Restaurant at The Fort, and experience the quality service and outstanding food at competitive prices that will ensure your total satisfaction. "Come and experience why the food at Palm Beach has consistently earned the highest praise from critics and customers alike." Cheng added.

ONE AEROPOLIS RECEPTION

TV personality Paolo Bediones declares his personal choice of investing in One Aeropolis condominium units as he emcees a recent reception by the Laguna Properties Holdings Inc, the Ayala Land subsidiary developing One Aeropolis in Sucat, Parañaque. With him is Manny Nisperos, LPHI executive vice president and deputy head who led LPHI officials in welcoming guests and buyers at the reception held at the Filipinas Heritage Library grounds. One Aeropolis is a complex of mid-rise 12-storey buildings at the site, which offers first-rate conveniences, facilities and services for homeowners in an airy environment. For more information, call LPHI at 814-7671; 814-7663.

GLOBE TELECOM
BATERYA
PROJECT
13th
CENTER

GLOBE SUPPORTS ABS-CBN FOUNDATION'S 'BANTAY BATERYA'

Globe Telecom recently entered into a partnership with ABS-CBN Foundation Inc's environmental arm, Bantay Kalikasan, for the safe disposal of Globe's used batteries from its cellsites nationwide. The project is called 'Bantay Baterya'. Shown during the agreement signing ceremonies are (from left): PRI VP and general manager Irving Guerrero, Bantay Kalikasan program director Marlo Mendoza, Globe logistics and admin support AVP Jose Cris Valencia and Globe safety and environmental management OIC Rolando Fabros. Looking on are (from left): Bantay Kalikasan external relations officer Winnie Dimanlig, Globe senior environmental specialist Melissa Besa, Globe materials management head Carmelo Ocampo and Bantay Kalikasan external affairs manager Mia Bunao.

LAS PINAS FEATURED IN CHANNEL 4'S BAYAN.PH

Congresswoman Cynthia Villar is shown with Claudine Zialcita, host of Channel 4's Bayan.ph during a taping for the show's episode last November. The show featured Las Piñas as a city to beat in Metro Manila. It showcased the city's local tourist destinations and the projects being implemented by Congresswoman Villar.

MFI offers latest courses

ENROLLMENT for Meralco Foundation Institute's (MFI) Information Technology Department is ongoing for its more than 20 different courses being offered to interested students.

The latest addition to its growing number of courses is Oracle which MFI-IT maintains partnership with significant providers in the IT industry like Microsoft, Cisco, Macromedia and IBM. MFI-IT is an authorized training center of the mentioned IT companies.

MFI-IT continues to offer quality training on network administration, database, programming, multimedia, web design and office productivity for the year 2004.

The MFI-IT department is located at the ground and 3rd floors of the MFI building, MFI campus along Ortigas Avenue Pasig. But it will also offer in-house trainings. Trainings that are customized to client needs can be delivered to their places.

MFI-IT will also offer trainings delivered through the Internet - delivering MFI's quality training.

For more information, call MFI at 632-0756 to 67 and ask for Ladee Crispo or Ronald Capacia at locals 331 or 301, email ronald.c@mfi.org.ph.

FILIPINA BAGS TOP PRIZE IN ROARING SURPRIZES!

The Singapore Tourism board handed out its Roaring SurPrizes! November grand prize to Corazon Sanchez, from the Philippines on Nov. 5, 2003. Sanchez walked away with $20,000 worth of Isetan shopping vouchers simply by participating in the Roaring SurPrizes! Surewin 'Spin & Win' game for visitors. The Roaring SurPrizes! Gazebo is located between the Heeren Shopping Centre and Faber House along Orchard Road. It is open from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. Visitors must produce their passports for verification purposes in order to participate in the Roaring SurPrizes! Draw. For more information about Singapore, call the Singapore Tourism Board's PR representative, Nancy Harel & Associates Inc, at 636-0258.

PHOTO EXHIBIT FOR CANCER PATIENTS

Framed Shots Camera Club (FSCC) in cooperation with Fujifilm, Dimetapp, Meralco Employees Fund for Charity Inc, and Mirror Magazine recently held a photo exhibit for the benefit of Palcare, which supports the Philippine General Hospital Department of Family and Community Medicine's Supportive Palliative and Hospice Care (SPHC). Shown cutting the ribbon during the opening ceremonies were (from left) Hollywood photographer Hans Bacher; Irma Santos, FSCC president; Eduviges Huang, chair, Federation of Philippines Photographers Foundation; Catherine Krings, SPHC assistant chair; Gina Meneses, marketing manager, Mirror Magazine; and Nicanor Santiago, Makati City administrator. Jamby Madrigal was also guest of honor.

HOLCIM, UNION CEMENT CELEBRATES 'DREAMS IN COLOR'

Holcim turned over a donation recently to the Nabunturan Child Assistance Program (NCAP) and Erda Tech at a cocktail party billed 'Dreams in Color' held at the Phinma Plaza in Rockwell, Makati. The turnover ceremonies was headed by Urs Bieri, Holcim Exco deputy CEO and Paul O'Callaghan, COO of Union Cement. The amount of CHF20,000 was turned over to Lydia Benedicto, NCAP project administrator. She was joined by Mayor Macario Humol of Nabunturan, Compostela Valley and the six kids from the Art Club of NCAP. On the other hand, CHF12,000 was also turned over to the Erda Tech Foundation represented by Wilma Nuyda and Lydia Solit.

Clips

Ati-atihan 2004

BRACE yourself for a unique kind of merriment and devotion in this year's Ati-atihan, and find out what makes it one of the most celebrated festivals famous the world over. Highlights include: Ati-atihan Nights (happening every evening in Magsaysay Park); Spiritual Street Dancing (Jan. 18, Kalibo streets); Pahilot or Paeapak (Jan. 14 to 18, Kalibo Cathedral); Purchase of Panay Reenactment and the Ms. Kalibo Ati-atihan Pageant (Jan. 15, at 7 p.m. in Magsaysay Park); Blessing of Children (Jan. 17 at 10 a.m., Kalibo Cathedral); Fireworks Display (Jan. 17 at 10 p.m. in Magsaysay Park); Dawn Rosary and Procession (Jan. 18 at 4:30 a.m., Kalibo Cathedral); Concelebrated Field Mass Offering (Jan. 18, Pastrana Park); Torch Parade and Procession (Jan. 18, Kalibo streets).

IAME offers Master of Arts Management degree

THE AUSTRALIAN Institute of Management Sciences (Aims) - a division of The Australian Institute of Music in Sydney, Australia - is proud to announce its international partnership with the International Academy of Management and Economics (IAME) located in Makati City. The alliance will enable the delivery of the Master of Arts Management degree via intensive face-to-face workshop delivery in the Philippines by Australian faculty who are highly experienced practitioners in the arts and management.

The Master of Arts Management is a one year degree program wherein graduates under the program shall earn a degree of equal status and standing as degrees conferred by any Australian Universities. Enrollment in the Master of Arts Management is ongoing. Classes in Makati will start in 2004. For inquiries, contact Gel or Sharon at 896-2358 or 896-2318.

Picpa holds 2004 induction

THE PHILIPPINE Institute of Certified Public Accountants (Picpa) will hold its induction of the year 2004 national executive officers and directors, sectoral council members, committee chairpersons and Metro Manila regional council and Southern Luzon council and chapters on Friday, Jan. 16, 6 p.m. at the Isla Ballroom, Edsa Shangri-La Manila, #1 Garden Way, Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong City. The theme is "A call for Personal Integrity and Commitment to Professional Accountability. Collectively our Mission". For more details, contact Beth Paguio at the national secretariat at 723-0691 and 723-6305

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SM CITY NORTH EDSA

1 BRIDAL SHOWER
2 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
3 CRYING LADIES
4 MEMENTO MORI
5 THE GATHERING
6 HAUNTED OFFICE
7 KILL BILL VOL. 1
8 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM CITY CEBU

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 KILL BILL VOL. 1
3 CRYING LADIES
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
5 MALIKMATA
6 MYSTIC RIVER
7 BRIDAL SHOWER
8 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM CITY BACOOR

1 BUFFALO SOLDIERS
2 MALIKMATA
3 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
4 BRIDAL SHOWER
5 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
6 KILL BILL VOL. 1
7 CRYING LADIES
8 GATAS

SM CITY PAMPANGA

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
3 CRYING LADIES
4 BRIDAL SHOWER
5 THE GRUDGE
6 KILL BILL VOL. 1

SM SUPER CTR. SUCAT

1 BRIDAL SHOWER
2 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
3 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
4 KILL BILL VOL. 1

SM BICUTAN

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 KILL BILL VOL. 1
3 CRYING LADIES
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM CITY MARILAO

1 KILL BILL VOL. 1
2 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
3 BRIDAL SHOWER
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM STA. MESA

1 CLOSED
2 CAPTAIN BARBELL
3 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
4 CRYING LADIES
5 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
6 MEMENTO MORI
7 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
8 BRIDAL SHOWER
9 KILL BILL VOL. 1
10 MANO PO 2

SM SOUTHMALL

1 MEMENTO MORI
2 MANO PO 2
3 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
4 HAUNTED OFFICE
5 CAPTAIN BARBELL
6 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
7 CRYING LADIES
8 KILL BILL VOL. 1
9 THE GATHERING
10 BRIDAL SHOWER

SM CITY FAIRVIEW

1 MANO PO 2
2 BUFFALO SOLDIERS
3 CAPTAIN BARBELL
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
5 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
6 KILL BILL VOL. 1
7 CRYING LADIES
8 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
9 BRIDAL SHOWER
10 MALIKMATA
11 HAUNTED OFFICE
12 FILIPINAS

SM CITY DAVAO

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 KILL BILL VOL. 1
3 MYSTIC RIVER
4 THE WISHER
5 RUGRATS GO WILD
6 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM CITY LUCENA

1 KILL BILL VOL. 1
2 OUT OF TIME
3 MALIKMATA
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM MEGAMALL

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
RESERVE-A-SEAT dial [illegible]
2 THE GATHERING
3 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
4 KILL BILL VOL. 1
5 MANO PO 2
6 BUFFALO SOLDIERS
7 FILIPINAS
8 MEMENTO MORI
9 BRIDAL SHOWER
10 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
11 HAUNTED OFFICE
12 CRYING LADIES

SM CINEMA TUTUBAN

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 KILL BILL VOL. 1
3 MALIKMATA
4 BRIDAL SHOWER

SM CITY ILOILO

1 BRIDAL SHOWER
2 RESERVED
3 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
4 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
5 ZHO YU'S TRAIN
6 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
7 RESERVED
8 GOOD BOY!

SM CITY MANILA

1 KILL BILL VOL. 1
2 THE GATHERING
3 MEMENTO MORI
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
5 HAUNTED OFFICE
6 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
7 BUFFALO SOLDIERS
8 MANO PO 2
9 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
10 GAGAMBOY
11 CRYING LADIES
12 BRIDAL SHOWER

SM CITY CAGAYAN DE ORO

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 GOOD BOY!
3 BRIDAL SHOWER
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

SM CITY BAGUIO

1 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING
2 KILL BILL VOL. 1
3 GOOD BOY!
4 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING

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2 KILL BILL VOLUME 1
11:15 FS/11:45 MF/2:00/4:15/6:30/8:45/10:35 LMF/11:00 LMF/12:50 END

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2 KILL BILL 10:20, 12:40, 3:00, 5:20, 7:40, 10:00
3 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING 12:30, 4:30, 8:30
4 MEMENTO MORI 12:05, 2:15, 4:30, 6:40, 9:00
5 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING 10:15, 2:10, 6:05, 10:00
6 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING 1:00, 5:00, 9:00
7 THE GATHERING 12:50, 2:50, 4:50, 6:55, 9:00
8 CRYING LADIES 11.20, 2.00, 4:30, 7.05, 9:45
9 HAUNTED OFFICE 10.50, 12.50, 2.50, 4.50, 6.55, 9.00
10 BRIDAL SHOWER 11.20, 2.00, 4.40, 7.20, 10.00

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2 BRIDAL SHOWER - 11:00, 1:45, 4:30, 7:15, 10:00
3 MEMENTO MORI - 11:30, 1:40, 3:50, 6:00, 8:10, 10:30
4 THE GATHERING - 11:10, 1:00, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, 10:00
5 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING - 12:50, 1:20, 5:00, 9:00
6 KILL BILL - 11:10, 1:45, 4:20, 6:55, 9:40
7 LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING - 12:50, 1:20, 5:00, 9:00

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1 THE GRUDGE
2 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING
3 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING
4 BRIDAL SHOWER
5 CRYING LADIES
6 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING
7 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING
8 KILL BILL

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4 CRYING LADIES
5 CAPTAIN BARBELL
6 FILIPINAS
7 BRIDAL SHOWER
8 MANO PO 2

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2 KILL BILL
3 BRIDAL SHOWER
4 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING

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1 KILL BILL
2 BRIDAL SHOWER
3 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING
4 LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING

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LOTR 3	2	LOTR 3
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JEEPERS CREEPERS	2	JEEPERS CREEPERS
LOTR 3	3	GOOD BOY
CRYING LADIES	4	LOTR 3
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OUT OF TIME	6	HOMECOMING

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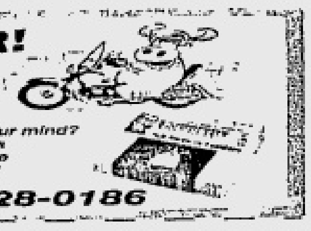

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BUSINESS

DoE signs pact with Dutch firm

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE DEPARTMENT of Energy yesterday signed a petroleum service contract (SC) with Premier Oil Philippines of the Netherlands, the first such deal in six years.

Energy Secretary Vincent Perez Jr. said the new SC represented renewed enthusiasm in local exploration for oil and natural gas.

The last SC was signed in October 1998, which covers an area in offshore Northwest Palawan.

Perez said the new deal is expected to bring in investments of between $4.6 million and $12.6 million or about P253 million to P693 million for the exploration stage alone.

He said the contract covered some 1.09 million hectares within the Southeast Luzon basin over Ragay Gulf and parts of Bondoc Peninsula.

The Southeast Luzon basin is one of the frontier basins in the country, meaning no drilling has been done in the area.

The new SC will have a seven-year term under the exploration phase, and can be extended for three more years to test the viability of putting the field into commercial production.

Perez said that the government was committed to helping the private sector explore for oil and gas.

In August last year, the DOE launched the First Philippine Petroleum Contracting Round or PCR-1, which is a new bidding scheme for rights to explore for oil and gas in the country.

Moody's to downgrade RP rating by one notch

By Doris C. Dumlao

BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura expects Moody's Investor Service to downgrade the country's sovereign credit rating by a single notch when it releases its latest evaluation next week.

This means that the Philippines' sovereign credit rating will deteriorate to two notches below investment grade, making it more difficult for the country to tap funds abroad.

The BSP chief said in an interview yesterday that while the credit rating downgrade was inevitable due to political uncertainties surrounding the May elections, the country stood a good chance of being downgraded by only one notch instead of two as earlier expected.

Buenaventura said fears of a possible two-notch downgrade by Moody's were triggered by concerns over the government's ability to meet its fiscal targets last year.

"We're hoping that with the good economic numbers and positive developments, we won't see that much of a downgrade," Buenaventura said.

Moody's earlier warned that recent political events "could strain the Philippines' external payments position," citing weak export data and declining foreign equity investment inflows.

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HYUNDAI

NFA doubles palay budget to ₱4B in '04

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE NATIONAL Food Authority has doubled its budget for palay procurement from P2 billion to P4 billion this year.

NFA Administrator Arthur C. Yap said in a statement that the success of its palay buying operations last year prompted the agency to double its procurement target from 6.7 million bags in 2003, worth some P2 billion, to at least 9.5 million bags this year.

Yap said more than half of the palay, equivalent to 5.2 million bags, would be purchased during the peak harvest season in the fourth quarter.

The balance would be bought during the summer or *palagad* harvest.

The NFA said that it would buy palay from March to August at a support price of P10 per kilogram, or P1 per kilogram more than the purchase price for the peak September-February period.

Yap said the NFA would provide incentives of 15 centavos and 10 centavos per kilogram to pay for the drying of the palay and transporting the produce to NFA buying stations and warehouses, thus, bringing the agency's effective buying price to P10.25 per kilogram.

The NFA will increase the number of its buying stations from 350 to 481 this year to cover for the increased procurement.

These buying stations will be put up in 1,243 municipalities and cities where the farmers can deliver their produce, he added.

Smart's phone subscribers increase to 13M

By Abigail L. Ho

SMART Communications Inc.'s subscriber base has increased to 13 million last year from 8.6 million in 2002, indicating that the demand for mobile phones shows no signs of waning.

Smart said in its 2003 accomplishment report that it now has around 4,000 cell sites all over the Philippines, enabling the firm to increase its subscriber base by around a million since October last year.

Smart said it would continue to invest in the construction of more cell sites, particularly in remote areas where cellular penetration is low or almost zero.

In 2003, Smart took advantage of the state-of-the-art Nokia ConnectSite global system for mobile communications (GSM) solution that was 25 percent more efficient than traditional cell sites.

This equipment enabled Smart to offer wider coverage at a lower cost, thus allowing the company to go to the country's fourth and fifth class municipalities.

Around 35 million Filipinos, mostly belonging to the D and E markets, live in these areas.

In a case study it presented in New Delhi late last year, Smart said the opportunities presented by the lower-income market segments were becoming more important to the overall growth in the wireless market.

"To address this market, Smart is changing the way it does business. Smart is working with handset vendors to offer lower-cost handsets and by also making available affordable SIM (subscriber identification module) packs," Smart's network services division head Rolando Pena said.

More than 90 percent of the country's cellular phone-wielding population preferred to be on prepaid plans.

The introduction of the lower denomination reloads via Smart Load helped arrest the company's churn, or disconnection, rate. From 3.4 percent in the first nine months of 2002, churn rate dropped to only 2.9 percent in the same period in 2003.

Auto industry should have reached its vehicle target units in '03—GM

By Tessa R. Salazar

THE AUTOMOTIVE industry fell short of the 2003 sales figures that it has originally targeted—91,000 units. General Motors Automobiles Philippines, however, believes the entire auto industry had already reached more than what it expected in its target last year had it added in its total sales figures that of GM Philippines.

The total combined sales figures of Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines Inc. (Campi) and the Truck Manufacturers Association reached 90,535 units in 2003 compared with the 84,041 units sold in 2002.

Total sales figure

The total automotive sales figures that should have come out, says GM Philippines, would have been at least 92,336 units in 2003 had GM, among other nonmembers, been included in the total sales performance tally.

GM—labeled in the Campi performance reports as a nonmember—has not been removed in the list, but only in the total auto industry sales performance, which Mariano claimed was noticed by colleagues in the industry during the mid-2003.

"Why do they want to show a lower industry number? And why did they remove us just recently, and not five years ago?"

> The issue here is they are not showing the true numbers of the whole auto industry. Whether member or not, the total figures generated by the auto industry should have been mentioned by Campi

The 2003 result, stressed a Campi official who refused to be named, reflected a 99 percent achievement of the total target, with or without figures from non-members.

Not the true numbers

"The issue here is they are not showing the true numbers of the whole auto industry. Whether member or not, the total figures generated by the auto industry should have been mentioned by Campi. The members' sales performance should be different from the auto industry. If all industry players are Campi members then (Campi) can claim its total sales figures indeed represented the auto industry," said GM's Nicky Mariano.

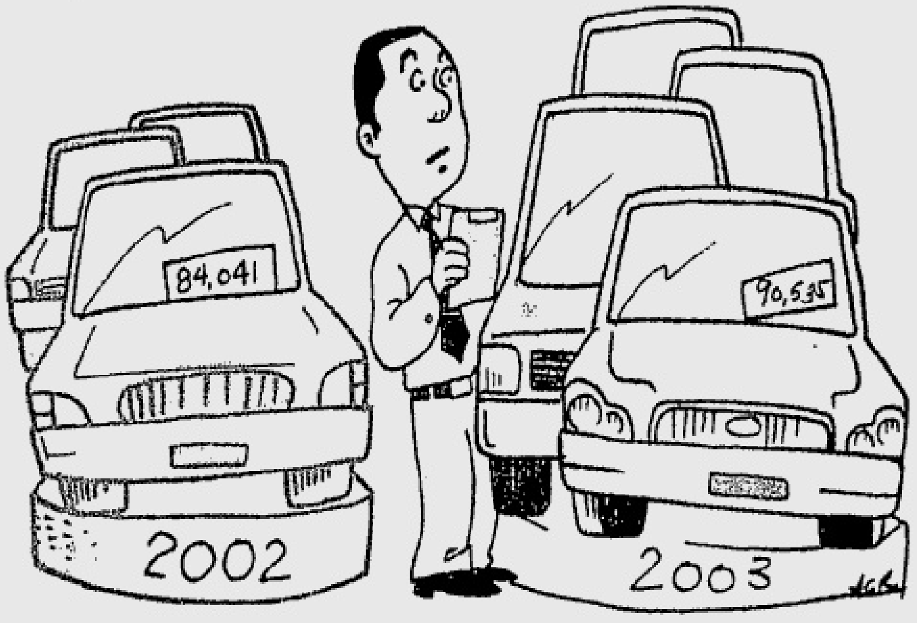
The Campi official who refused to be named said Campi-TMA had achieved at least 99 percent of the target even without GM's figures.

"I had raised this issue but majority of the members wanted the privilege of being the only ones on the total auto industry sales report. It is a privilege to say that you have contributed to the total improvement of the auto industry," said a Campi official.

GM sold a total of 1801 units for 2003—861 of these cars, and 940 light commercial vehicles.

Mariano said GM had been making headway recently, with its Optra placing second in the 1.6-liter segment from September to November. It was No. 3 up to December.

Mariano said GM couldn't be given Campi membership because it didn't have an assembly plant in the Philippines. "But if you come to think of it, many members don't have local plants either."



A Campi official who refused to be named admitted that there were indeed members that didn't have assembly plants. They were, however, founding members. Subsequent members were required to have assembly operations.

GM, however, was included in the list of vehicle sales enumerated in the sales report. It was not included in the total number of vehicle sales performance.

A Campi official who refused to be named said Campi would like to get as much available data as possible, even from nonmembers.

"If that is the case," said a Campi official, "then GM should not be the only one included, but every non-Campi member as well."

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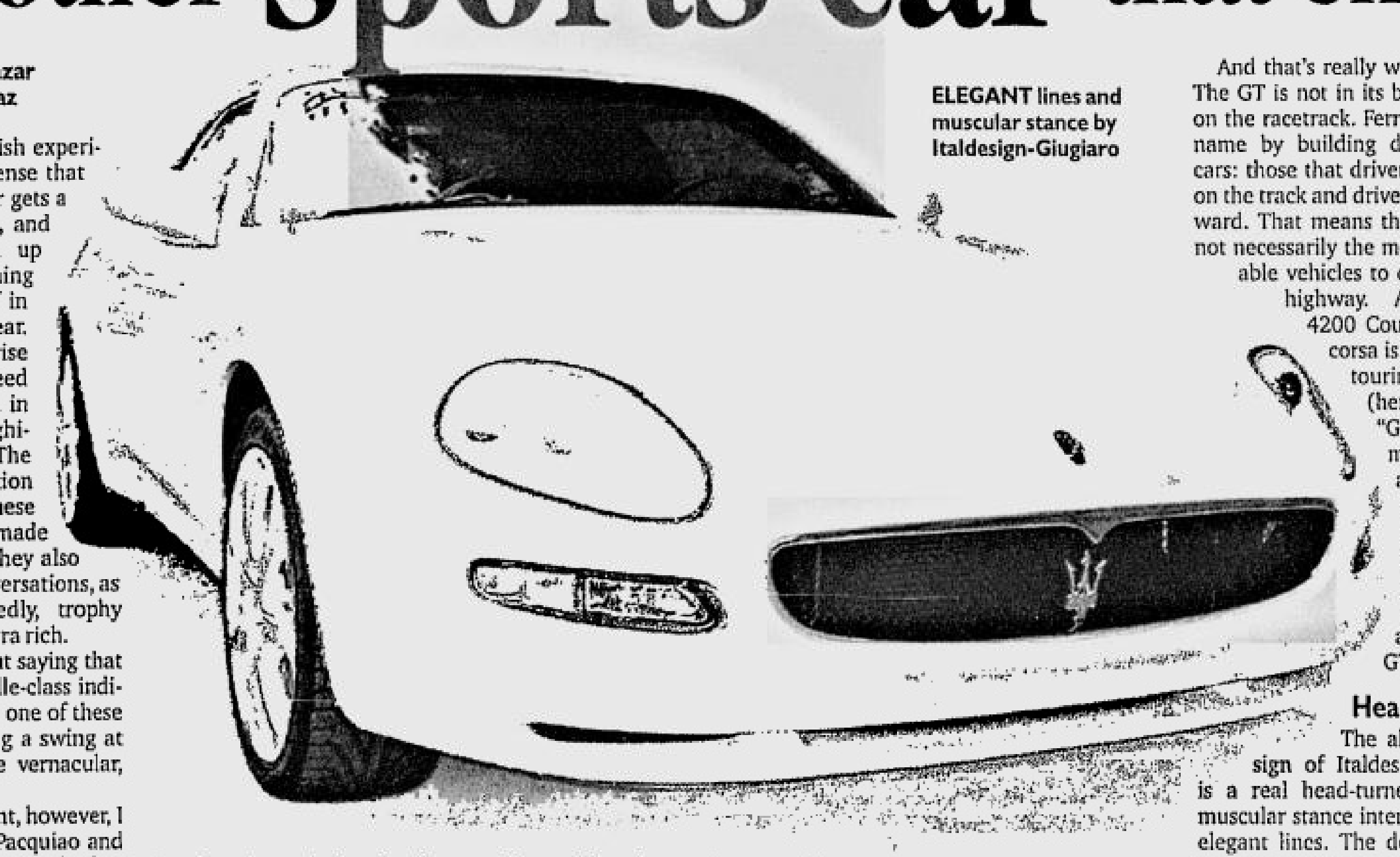
The other sports car that ends with 'i'

Text by Tessa R. Salazar
Photos by Alex P. Loinaz



ELEGANT lines and muscular stance by Italdesign-Giugiaro

SPEED is a selfish experience, in the sense that only the driver gets a kick out of the rush, and the passengers end up clutching at anything they can get hold of in the car because of fear. So, it isn't a surprise when Italy's speed monster cars all end in "i": Ferrari, Lamborghini and Maserati. The "selfish" connection doesn't end there. These cars break man-made highway laws, and they also start showroom conversations, as they are, undoubtedly, trophy sports cars for the ultra rich.

And it goes without saying that for an ordinary middle-class individual to get to drive one of these beauties is like taking a swing at the moon, or in the vernacular, *suntok sa buwan.*

But last Friday night, however, I made like a Manny Pacquiao and TKO'd me a heavenly body, but only so briefly.

The meeting place was near Westin Plaza on Roxas Boulevard. The wish was made a long time ago. But now, a shooting star darted across the night sky, and before I could focus my eyes on it, it was gone, or so I thought. When I looked down, an exquisite piece of rolling Italian artwork—a luxury sports car with the Maserati logo—rolled to a stop in front of me with its engines gurgling.

The Maserati 4200 Coupé Cambiocorsa loaned to this writer for just an hour has an exclusivity guarantee price tag of P9.5 million. Well, thanks to the amended excise tax law, the original price of P14.7 million was brought down to that. How exclusive is this Maserati? Well, as far as Jaguar Cars Inc., the exclusive distributor of Maserati in the country, knows there are only two such owners here.

For such a price, there is so much to expect from the Maserati. And it doesn't disappoint. The coupé has an equivalent technology of Formula 1-style computer-controlled versions, whose official term is the F1 gearbox. Maserati calls its own the Cambiocorsa or race-change gearbox, which is positioned at the rear of the car in a single unit with the differential (otherwise known as the transaxle transmission layout) even as the engine is positioned at the vehicle's front.

HEAD turner at yellow

Unique experience

With all that technology under both ends of the car, driving the Maserati is quite a unique experience. It doesn't have a pedal for a clutch. Instead, it has gear paddles under the right and the left sides of the steering wheel. To shift, the driver chooses either the full automatic or he or she can override the system by shifting gears down or up using the paddles or one can use the manual transmission.

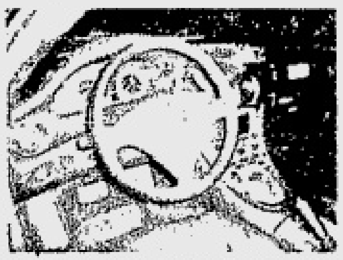
The close gear ratios make the Maserati fun to drive, once you get used to "paddle-shifting." Pushing the right lever shifts up, pushing the left lever downshifts.

Putting the drive on sports mode, and the suspension goes taut. Putting it back to standard mode makes the suspension change accordingly to a softer ride. Pulling on both levers makes the car go into neutral.

Taming a wild animal

How to drive the Maserati smooth is really up to you. Anyone can tame a wild animal. The question is when. The Maserati Coupé Cambiocorsa 4200 is a luxury sports car, classified as a GT (for grand touring), and it is, indeed, intended for the exclusive ultra elite who can handle power without tiring too fast. And, in truth, this car almost has the power of a Ferrari Modena.

How close is almost? Imagine a maximum power delivery of 390 bhp at 7,000 rpm. That's only 10 shy of a 360 Ferrari Modena (400 bhp). In terms of acceleration this car is only three tenths of a second behind the Modena when it reaches 60 mph (96 kph). Its top speed is only about 10 kph slower than the Modena. Maserati has a top speed of 285 km per hour at 7,550 rpm. It is Maserati's torque that could beat the hell out of the Modena at 330 lb ft of torque versus Modena's 275 lb ft.



THE DASHBOARD'S handsome lines

STUNNING V8 engine

Riding comfort

But when we speak of riding comfort, the Maserati zooms way ahead. That doesn't mean, though, that Ferraris are a hellish ride. It's just that with the Ferraris, it's common for drivers and passengers to say they had made some compromises in the comfort department.

And that's really what a GT is. The GT is not in its best element on the racetrack. Ferrari made its name by building dual-purpose cars: those that drivers could run on the track and drive home afterward. That means these cars are not necessarily the most comfortable vehicles to drive on the highway. A Maserati 4200 Coupé Cambiocorsa is built for the touring circuit (hence the "Gran Turismo" term), and it would even be a car that is considered more comfortable among the GT class.

Head-turner

The all-Italian design of Italdesign-Guigiaro is a real head-turner, with the muscular stance intertwined with elegant lines. The design allows adults to sit comfortably in the rear seats without compromising the compact dimension of a sports car.

The hair at my nape stood when I found a short open stretch of road. I could not, for the life of me, put pedal to the metal. As the owner, who sat beside me, warned that I should be careful with this car. Not because I was driving around a car that could shame any Makati condo unit for its price, but because I was sitting on a monster of an engine that could engulf my soul if I bit off more than I could chew.

If I made even a slight miscalculation at full throttle, the consequences could be disastrous. So, I tried to relax and shifted the paddle to the fully automatic drive, and didn't push full throttle.

And just like a shooting star, the four-seater car easily revved to 7,500 in the first gear alone and shot from 0 to 100 kph in 4.9 seconds.

Work of art

The engine is a work of art. Under the coupé's hood is an 8-cylinder, 90-degree "V" aspirated 4.2-liter engine made of lightweight alloy, and just like most advanced racing engines, has a dry sump lubrication and pump assembly outside the engine block. It also has a timing gear featuring two overhead camshafts per bank with chain drive, four valves per cylinder operated by hydraulic tappets and inlet camshafts equipped with continuously variable timing. That adds to the already powerful 390 bhp at 7,000 rpm and a spirited 451Nm of torque at 4,500 rpm. Whew, that's it.

To make all that power stop on a dime, it uses the famed Brembo brakes, traction control and braking by Controlled Area Network or CAN line.

Now, is this the "poor man's Ferrari"? Jaguar Cars Inc.'s Carlo Nakpil said the term was rather unfair, since the two were considered different animals altogether.

"The Ferrari is more raw, more thoroughbred (in its design and purpose)."

Insulation is high-tech, as well. Sensors on the frameless windows go to work as soon as the doors are closed, as they lock against the pillars to seal out the wind.

The power seat adjustments, however, were not adequate to place my line of sight comfortably above the dashboard. So, all the time I drove, I was craning my neck to see up front.

The dashboard has handsome lines with dual speed readings for kph and mph. What struck me was the 320 kph top speed. The rpm red line starts at 7,500. The classic-look clock is placed at the middle of the dash and there's an information center.

I was also familiarized with the audio auditorium 200 audio sound. To be sure, it was the right sound system for a P10-million car. The model I drove doesn't have a GPS (global positioning system) but the info screen is standard.

Personalizing the car

And because this car is that expensive, a would-be owner is given the privilege of "personalizing" the car. The owner has a choice of a gold clock, leather headliner, leather ceiling, type of leather, color, and contrasting piping via the Officine Alfieri Maserati personalization program. Up to 16 body paints, 10 shades of leather upholstery and five carpet colors is available. Such options could also extend to the facia, door panels, rear shelf, steering wheel and even runs to the color of the stitching thread and the piping on the facia.

Verdict: Maserati is one great conversation piece. If you want to own a piece of history and a rare high-tech trophy car, then write that P9.5-million check. If you do, look for the other two Maserati owners and form your own three-member Maserati Club. How's that for exclusivity?

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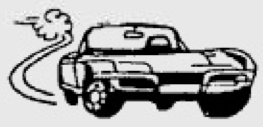
500 Altis units a month

FULL TANK



Al Mendoza

I RECENTLY read an item in the Herald Tribune, written by Heejin Koo and datelined Seoul, about a plea by Hyun Jung Eun for her compatriots to buy new Hyundai stocks.

And who is Hyun? And what Hyundai stocks is she trying to sell?

Hyun is the widow of Chung Mong Hun, who committed suicide some weeks back, leaving Hyun the daunting job of running the show at Hyundai.

* * *

Hyundai what again?

The Hyundai being referred to here is the Hyundai Elevator, the giant South Korean industrial group. The Hyundai Elevator became the de facto holding company of the super-rich Chung clan after Hyundai Motor, now part of Hyundai Automotive Group, split from the Hyundai Group in 2001.

It seems the breakup has made Hyundai Motor stronger in the Asian automotive business, especially in the Philippines as evidenced by the Starex's strong showing against established giants in the industry. (Right, Ms Agudo?)

* * *

The 48-year-old Hyun took over Hyundai although she has no managerial experience.

"If Hyundai disappears as a page in history, it would be such a loss to the public," said Hyun, who has a master's degree in history from Ewha Women's University in Seoul but has not held a business management position before her husband's death.

After marrying Chung Mong Hun in 1976, Hyun became a director of the Korean Girl Scout Association and an adviser to the Korean Red Cross. She became a widow when her husband, 54, jumped from his 12th floor office in Seoul after prosecutors questioned him for three days over an alleged $450 million funneled to North Korea. They payoffs were supposedly made to ensure the presence of the North's present leader, Kim Jong Il, at a 2001 summit meeting between the South and North that earned a Nobel Peace Prize for Kim Dae Jung, the former South Korean president.

In Chung's suicide note, Chung urged the Hyundai president to continue his father's work in the North. The suicide's father was born in the North.

The job she has inherited has become a big challenge to Hyun since the company is wracked by internal strife due mainly to family squabbling over inheritance and power struggle. But the widow is undaunted: "It's not fair for the shareholders to lump the company's losses incurred through family feud. If they're level-headed, the shareholders will sell, sell, sell."

SOLD!
SOLD!
499

Fighting words, indeed.

* * *

The iron railings separating road lanes on Pasong Tamo in Makati are being blamed for the dawn death recently of the nephew of Mike Arroyo, the First Gentleman.

I disagree. The people who placed the railings there should be the ones to blame. It's because they placed them there with barely enough lighting to announce the railing's presence. The tragedy happened in pitch dark, meaning there were no lights to warn motorists of the presence of railings there.

The truth is, many areas in the metropolis—the Ayala tunnel included—aren't properly lighted. Even miniature islands, especially those at Guadalupe Bridge, are barely visible at night. For one to be safe while driving in the metropolis, he or she has to remember the city's geography to avoid hitting accident-causing railings, unnecessary islands and even improperly placed humps. Edsa alone has become a veritable death trap, what with its "lumps," potholes and dangerous iron railings placed in wanton disregard of common sense, if not traffic sense. And this is not to mention the numerous U-turn slots, many of which had been improperly made and therefore the source of many mishaps almost every day.

Is the so-called traffic hero of the city, Bayani Fernando, listening?

* * *

GRATITUDE. My gratitude to Myrna Gonzales of Isuzu. I left my "Rubber Soul" CD in her Trooper some time ago. In no time, I had my precious CD by The Beatles back. Right at my doorstep. Neatly wrapped and sent by express delivery. Said Myrna: "I know you will die for The Beatles. Our Ronald will have it delivered to you ASAP." As I write this, a song from that CD is playing, titled "And Your Bird Can Sing." To Myrna, here's a glass.

KUDOS. Happy birthday to buddies Vernon B. Sarne (Jan. 9), Erle Sebastian (Jan. 10) and Butch "Elvis" Gamboa (Jan. 11). As usual, they had their "Triple Crown Affair" on Jan. 11 at the Green Valley clubhouse in Pasig City. I missed that one but I'm sure all three raised their glasses on my behalf. More birthdays to come your way, amigos!

* * *

I couldn't help but admire the creativity of Toyota hot shot Danny Isla in launching the New Corolla Altis on Jan. 9. The background song for the unveiling of this newest Toyota babe was "All You Need Is Love," a hit song by who else but The Beatles.

A certified Beatlemanic himself like Vernon and me, Danny I said in his speech: *"Ang Beatles parang Toyota...paborito noon, paborito ngayon* and once you're hooked, it's for life!"

Toyota president Nobuharu Tabata and marketing strategist Kenji Nakashima, who just hit town days before the occasion to replace the well-loved Makoto Ono who was recalled to the mother office in Tokyo, could only clap approvingly. Tabata said Toyota hoped to sell 500 Altis units a month and Nakashima said he'd try to maintain his single-digit golf handicap while at the same time help maintain Toyota's industry leadership. But those are items for future discussions here.

So stick around, fellas?

* * *

QUOTE ME. When you are too tired to drive home, leave the car in the office and take a cab. Think safe and that can make you see the light of dawn.

NISSAN Frontier

Nissan Frontier dominates compact pickup category

WITH A GRAND slam already in the bag, Universal Motors Corp.'s vaunted Nissan Frontier marks yet another milestone in 2003. Racing up the sales charts, the Frontier claims the top spot as the best-selling double cab compact pickup for the year.

The year-end figures from the Truck Manufacturers Association of the Philippines reflect a 34.2 percent total market share for the Frontier in the combined 4x4 and 4x2 compact pickup category.

Impressive performance

The Nissan Frontier tops its nearest competitor close to 1,000 units more during the year. This is a most impressive performance—extending Nissan's dominance of the pickup market for the 4th consecutive year.

The Nissan Frontier maintains its No. 1 position in the 4x2 category. With a whopping 39.2 percent share of market, the perennial leader sold more than 1,000 units in 2003, beating the Ford Ranger and the Isuzu Fuego and the D-max.

Gunning its engines to full speed, Nissan closed the gap with longtime rival Mitsubishi in the 4x4 category. Year-end totals show a mere four-unit difference in sales, with the Frontier garnering a 29.8 percent market share, to share the Top 2 positioning with Strada.

4th straight year

Nissan's fourth consecutive reign at the top was boosted by the release of the Frontier Titanium 4x2 in the fourth quarter of the year. Powered by the same topnotch engine of the original Frontier model, the Titanium also boasts of bolder, industrial-inspired trimmings on the body, scarlet-stitched leather seats, power-side mirrors with LED signal lights and a windshield mounted rain sensor. A renegade in the world of 4x2s, the Frontier Titanium has the looks and personality to surge through the toughest of terrains, as well as outpace the competition.

With manufacturer UMC gearing up to celebrate its 50th anniversary this year, there is little doubt that the Frontier will be gunning for a fifth title in 2004. With such an extended reign at No. 1, and more than a few surprises left in the champ, one can only expect that the Nissan Frontier will continue to enjoy its premiere position as the country's favorite pickup.

THE VOLVO S40 SE

Cars tested in 2003: A review

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

IT'S not too late in the New Year to make a quick review of the motor vehicles this column tested in 2003, so here goes:

- **Isuzu Trooper Skyroof Edition.** Isuzu distinguished its flagship SUV from the competition by installing an electronically controlled skyroof, a feature that its rivals do not have. Aside from this, Isuzu equipped the family-friendly 2003 Skyroof Edition with an in-dash CD/VCD player, two headrest-mounted LCD monitors and remote control to keep the kids in the back seat entertained during traffic jams. Nonetheless, the Trooper's edge over other, better-looking SUVs is its diesel fuel efficiency. The 4x2 Trooper averaged 30.8 km per liter in a 2002 economy run.

- **Volvo S40 SE.** At the time of the test drive, the Volvo S40 (P1,595,000) was priced lower than other entry-level premium cars such as the Mercedes C180 Classic, Audi A4 and Jaguar X-Type. (Because of the revised excise tax law, the S40's price is now P1,525,000.) While the BMW 316Li cost some P20,000 less in January 2003, the entry-level Bimmer has a small 1.6-liter, 105-bhp engine compared to the S40's 2.0-liter, 136 bhp powerplant. Add to this the abundance of safety and luxury features that are standard in Volvo cars and you'll know why the S40 got my vote.

- **Toyota Revo Sport Runner (SR).** Toyota spruced up its top-of-the-line AUV for 2003 with a new grille, a new front bumper with integrated fog lamps, bigger tail lights, new 15-inch mag wheels and a more elegant dashboard. Noticing the success of the Isuzu Hilander/Crosswind XUVi, the first AUV to have headrest-mounted LCD monitors, TMPC added a VCD entertainment system on board. However, despite these enhancements making the Revo look more like a sleek minivan than an AUV workhorse, the gasoline-fed 1.8-liter unit I test-drove lacked power and its automatic transmission shifted gears noisily and laboriously.

- **Volvo S40 T4.** Two weekends after test-driving the normally aspirated Volvo S40 SE, I was given the chance to check out its turbocharged equivalent, the S40 T4. What a difference high-pressure turbo makes! Although I was already impressed with the SE's vigorous acceleration, the T4's dynamic throttle response and full-power kickdown was simply stunning. For P175,000 more, the T4 (P1,700,000) gives you 200 bhp and 300 Nm peak torque ranging from 2,500 rpm all the way to 4,000 rpm compared to the SE's more modest output. The price difference is well worth it as the S40 T4 is the finest entry-level luxury car available here.

- **Toyota RAV4 Sport Vehicle (SV).** The major difference between the RAV4 SUV and the RAV4 SV, aside from the latter's having no 4WD capability, is engine displacement. The SUV has a 2.0-liter powerplant while the SV's is 1.8 and comes with manual transmission only. Naturally, the SV is cheaper than the SUV, costing less than P1 million. I drove the SV for five days and found its engine performance, handling and ride at par with its more expensive counterpart. Toyota obviously launched the RAV4 SV to grab market share from the Honda CR-V which, at that time, was selling briskly, being priced at less than P1 million because its alleged 10-passenger capacity exempted it from the excise tax. When the new excise tax law cancelled the tax exemption of 10-seater vehicles, the 4x2 CR-V lost its price advantage. Which is why Toyota relaunched the 4x4 RAV4 SUV after loading it with more attractive features and why Honda finally came out with the "comfortable" RealTime 4WD, 5-passenger CR-V to eventually replace the 10-seater CR-V.

- **Ford Ranger.** The 2003 Ranger's 2.5-liter intercooled turbo diesel engine, capable of 117 ps/3500 peak horsepower and 280 Nm/2,000 rpm torque, is more powerful than pickup market leader Nissan Frontier's. When I drove a 4x2 Ranger Trekker one weekend, I appreciated the relatively quiet (for a diesel) power of its engine and its low levels of NVH (noise, vibration and harshness). Like the recently launched Isuzu D-Max, the 4x4 Ranger XLT has dual SRS airbags and anti-lock braking system (ABS) as standard equipment. The '03 Ranger, assembled in Thailand, costs P20,000 less than the previous model because of Ford's product specialization program under the Asean Free Trade Agreement (Afta).

Ten more cars ('03 Honda Accord, Toyota Vios, '03 Honda City, '03 Volvo S80, Ford Escape 4 cyl., Nissan X-Trail, BMW X5, Chevrolet Aveo, Chevrolet Optra, '03 BMW 530d) were checked out by this column last year, but lack of space compels me to stop here and continue next week.

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: Even crime wouldn't pay if the government ran it.

2004 Altis launch caps triple win for automaker

By Tessa R. Salazar

THE 2004 Altis

WHAT a way to end 2003 and start 2004. However predictable it may sound, Toyota Motor Philippines—the country's best selling automotive brand for 13 years—still couldn't hide its elation as it boldly declared it emerged as the No. 1 automotive company in 2003 in ceremonies held recently at the Westin Philippine Plaza on Roxas Boulevard.

It bragged a total market share of 30 percent, the highest ever achieved by any manufacturer since 1994, says TMP.

Biggest market share

Figures from the Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers Philippines (Campi) showed TMP topping both the commercial vehicles and passenger car categories—reaping the biggest in market share. It grabbed 48 percent of market share in passenger cars followed by Honda Cars Philippines at 23.71 percent. Toyota grabbed a 24.68-percent share in the commercial vehicle market, followed by Mitsubishi Motors Philippines Corp with 20.28 percent.

TMP president Nobuharu Tabata enumerated the automaker's achievements that included being No. 1 in passenger cars, in commercial vehicles and in overall sales. He cited Camry, Altis, Vios and the Revo as the No. 1 vehicles in their respective categories.

TMP is also the top-ranking car brand in customer satisfaction based on the latest results of JD Power Asia Pacific. Tabata promised customers that they could expect continuous upgrade and improvements of the dealership facilities and the services it offers.

Altis launch

TMP capped its celebration when it brought out the 2004 Corolla Altis featuring a sportier and more stylish exterior. The 2004 Altis now offers perforated leather seats, a power driver seat adjustable in eight positions, two-tone interior color scheme and wood trim redesigned with a darker shade.

Its exterior styling sports clear lenses with wide illumination, a redesigned front grille with the new gradient mesh with chrome horizontal fins. Also noticeable are the new bumper design and fog lamps.

The 2004 Altis also features Light Emitting Diode or LED combination lamps that are brighter but consume less power. Additional features are retractable side mirrors, new corner and backup sensors and a new 15-inch alloy wheel design.

Performance OWS

[illegible] Avenue, North Fairview, Q.C. (infront of CASA Milan)

"EXPERIENCE THE LATEST GERMAN TECHNOLOGY"

OWS Super Lube Packages

I Oil Change Packages (4 Liter)
A. Mineral Oil OWS - 20W-50 Php [illegible]
FREE LABOR
B. Semi-synthetic OWS - 10W-40 Php [illegible]
FREE LABOR & OIL FILTER
C. Full-synthetic OWS - 5W-50 Php [illegible]
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Michelle or Gemma

It's about time, tipirin ang GASOLINA!!!

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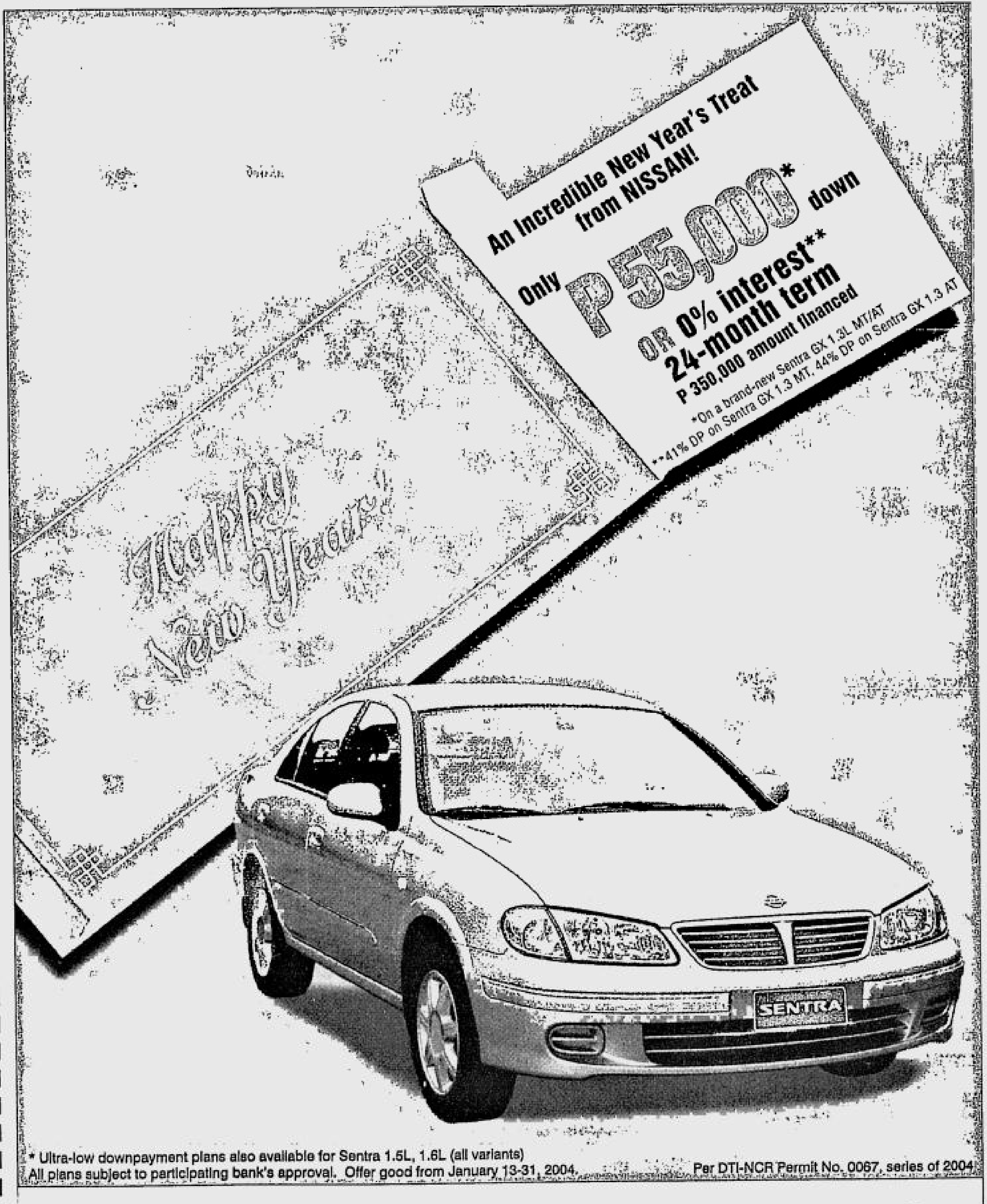

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Racing blood pumps through the Ford Lynx's veins

Articles by **CHARLES E. BUBAN**

IT WASN'T long ago when a Ford sedan set a 30-year winning spree in international rallies.

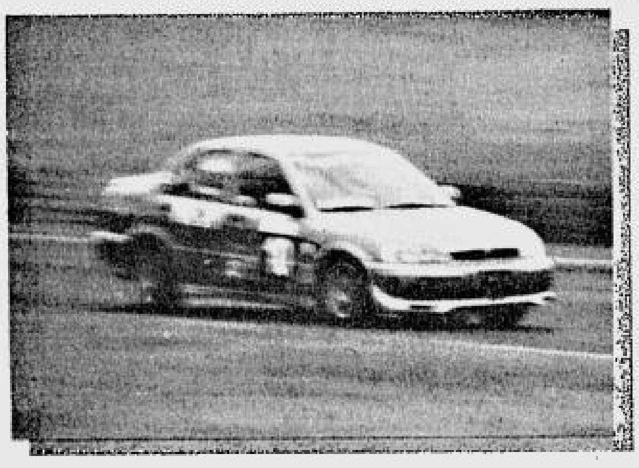
It started in 1968 when a debuting 1.6L Ford Escort Twin Cam captured the Circuit of Ireland, Dutch Tulip, Austrian Alpine, Acropolis and Scottish rallies, all within eight weeks. By the end of its season, the Escort had also won the famous 1,000 lakes rally in Finland, which helped Ford secure the World Rally Championship for makes.

From then on, the Escort never looked back as it became a consistent rally winner in every category it entered in to.

That same racing blood is evidently pumping through the veins of this latest sedan model from Ford. Filipino racing fans got to see first hand how the 1.6L Lynx performed in the circuit when Ford Philippines decided to put the car in two local motorsports events-the Tuason Racing School-Ford Lynx Cup race series and the Festival of Motorsports Enduro.

The move clearly hints of the company's plan to dominate local racing scene in the coming years. The two events gave Ford Philippines a chance to evaluate the Lynx as to how it would fare in the tracks and how long can it last punishing long hours of driving.

Based from the results, Ford, no doubt, has created a new generation of hot-blooded machine ready to make a mark in local motorsports racing.



A Lynx in the hands of novice racers

THIS MUST be the coolest feeling for circuit car race newcomer Jeff Jan Borja.

The 24-year-old lending investor manager remembered just being a fan of sports racing and never thought of getting into racing himself.

Borja is doing a whole lot better these days: Despite being closely challenged by quick-and similarly novice-challengers, he nevertheless collected enough points (collected in 10 races) to capture the first Tuason Racing School-Ford Lynx Cup race series of 2003.

The race series is a culmination of what Borja and the rest of his batch have learned in the basic and advance courses they took at the Tuason Racing School. The school, a brainchild of kart champion and F3 driver JP Tuason, was conceived to discover and develop young Filipino drivers who dream of having a career in motorsports racing.

Level playing field

To ensure a level playing field among all competitors, the race series teamed up with Ford Philippines who provided eight brand new 1.6-liter Ford Lynxs to be the official racecars.

This way, the participants can focus more on developing their skills and worry less their cars' technical set-up.

"Ford Philippines strongly supports this venture for we believe racing is a discipline that Filipinos can be superior in," said Ford Philippines VP for Sales and Marketing Dave Macasadia. "By providing the official race cars, we are giving these (local racing) newcomers a dependable unit that can help them reach their goal."

Indeed, the Lynx met every expectation as it kept up with each participant's raw skills and unique driving styles with a dependable race package.

Sporty package

The official racecar of the TRS-Ford Lynx Cup race series is a production variant garnished only with safety cages, bucket seats and safety harnesses.

This sporty package still boasts of a 1.6 liter DOHC engine with Rapid Response Engineering (RRE) that gives the Lynx brisk acceleration and agile performance.

Delivering a reliable 118 ps of horsepower and maximum torque of 14.8 kg.m., the 1.6L Lynx is mated to a power-assisted steering wheel and a 4-wheel disc brakes to generate better handling and maneuverability.

"The Lynx displayed supreme reliability in all the 10 races and helped our graduates believed in themselves as let them felt what pro-racing is all about," Tuason said.

BORJA

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Lynx tough it out with the rest

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While the Tuason Racing School-Ford Lynx Cup race series saw the Lynx's performance on the racing course, the recently concluded Goodyear Ducaro GA Enduro Cup 2003 saw how tough the Lynx can be against the competition.

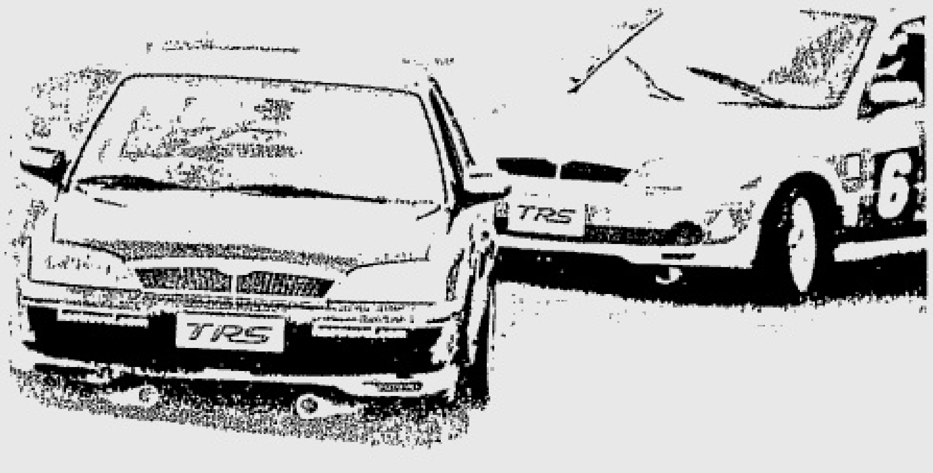
The Enduro Cup, part of the annual Philippine Motorsports Festival, was held around Subic International Raceway's 3.1-kilometer track where over 20 participating cars drove for four hours while collecting the most number of laps.

While the 1.6L Lynx looked a bit overmatched at the beginning (due to its competitors' various modified features), the Lynx, in the end, came through and in fact, bested the competition.

The team of C! Magazine's Kenny Quintal and Kevin Limjoco and TRS-Ford Lynx Cup top graduates Jeff Borja and Dominic Ochoa bagged the top spot of the Novice Class category in 121 laps, while the team of veteran racers JP Tuason, Angelo Barretto and Art Feliciano finished a solid second in the Open Class category with 119 laps.

"This is a major achievement for both teams," said Ford Philippines VP for Sales and Marketing Dave Macasadia who lauded the fine performance of the Lynx in such an extreme test of endurance.

"Indeed, the Lynx lived up to the exacting requirements of the endurance race and proved the sturdiness and reliability of the Lynx," he added.



The RS: Not your everyday Lynx

IT'S a dressed up version of the Ford Lynx but there's more to this flaming red beauty.

The new Lynx 2.0 liter RS (racing series) has everything speed enthusiasts would want in their sports car: nice looks, ample power under the hood and stable ride.

"The Lynx RS is our answer to the growing racing enthusiast market and completes the Ford Lynx model line-up," says Ford Philippines VP for Sales and Marketing Dave Macasadia.

Dressed to race

The Lynx RS is dressed to race with its mesh front grille, smoked headlamps, fog lamps, side skirts and 16" seven-spoke alloy wheels and sport tires. This is further enhanced with its electric slide and tilt moonroof, rear skirt, spoiler with integrated stop lamp and tailpipe garnish.

Inside, the Lynx RS dons a sportier interior with its race-inspired two-tone red and black contour bucket seats for better comfort and control, white-faced gauges for easy readability and RS leather-wrapped steering wheel.

2.0-liter engine

Underneath its hood, the Lynx RS is powered by a 2.0L engine that features a sophisticated Variable Inertia Charging System to optimize airflow into the engine at high rpm for improved drivability and responsive acceleration and a healthy 142 ps of horsepower and 192 Nm of torque.

A fully independent trapezoidal suspension design proven on race and rally tracks offers the Lynx RS its best-in-class handling during tight bends and maneuverings.

Completing this package is the Lynx RS safety edge: dual front airbags, triple-H body structure, anti-lock brake system and electronic brake force distribution.

For more information on the new Ford Lynx 2.0L RS, log on to the official Ford Group Philippines website, www.ford.com.ph.

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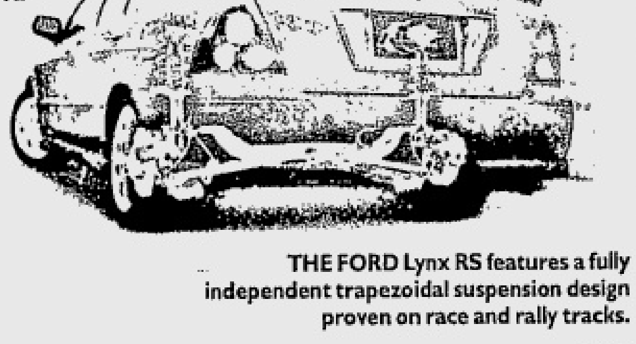

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ADVT.

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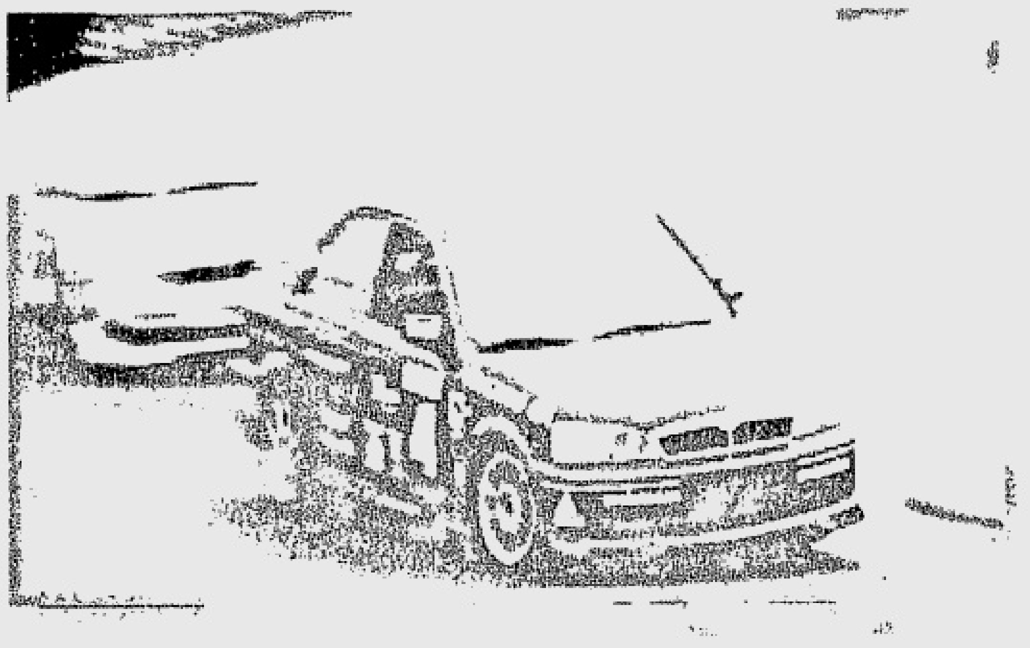

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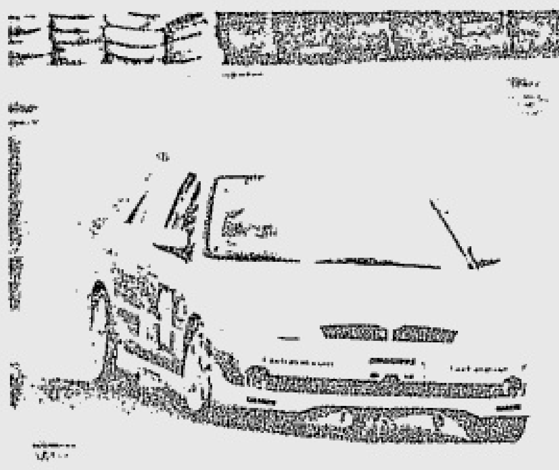

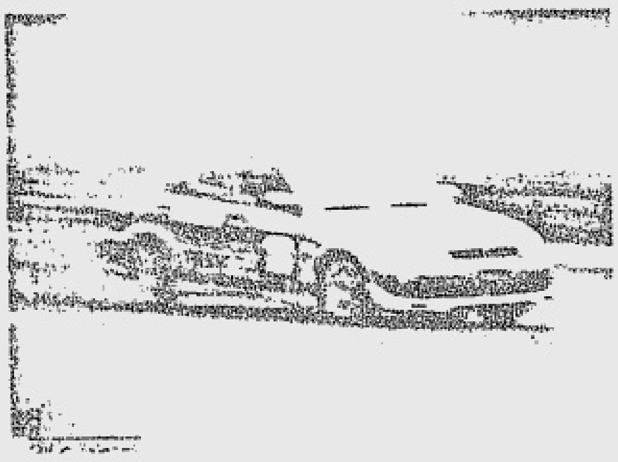

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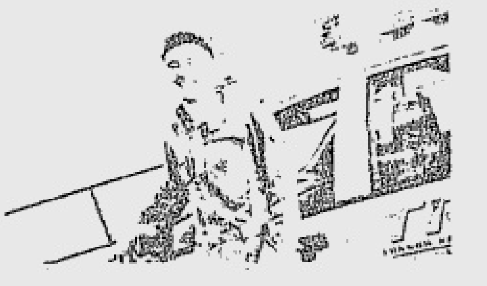

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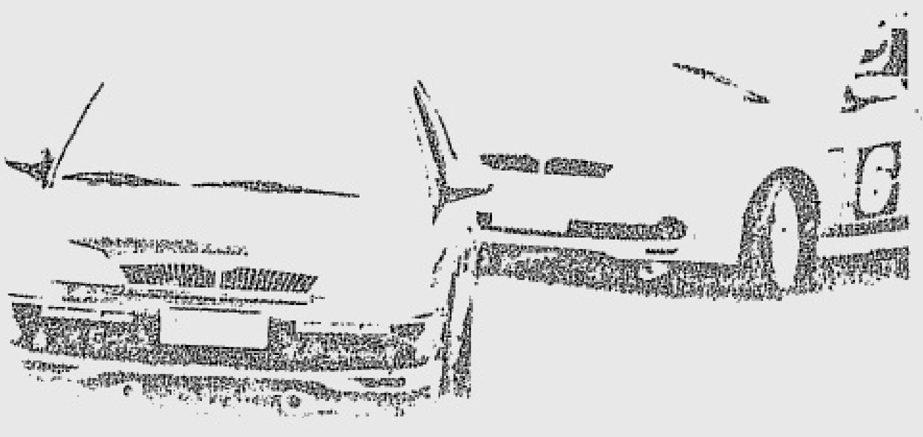

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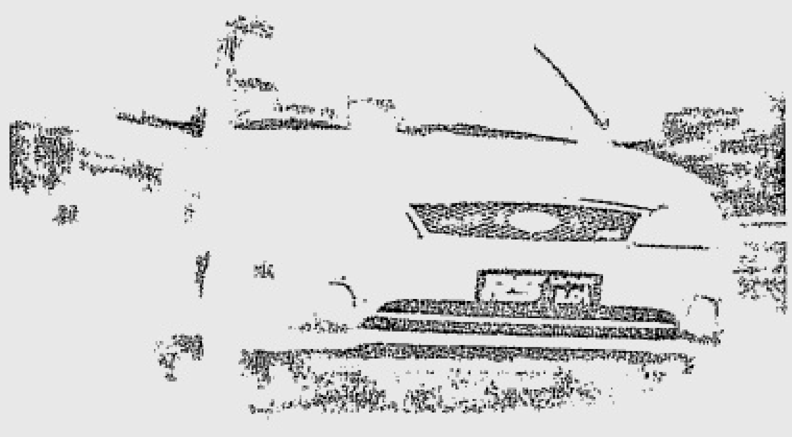

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2.0-liter engine

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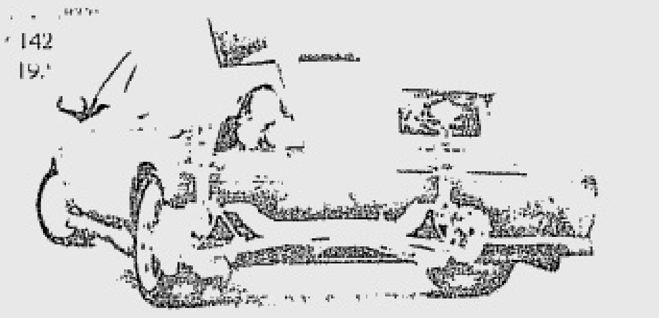

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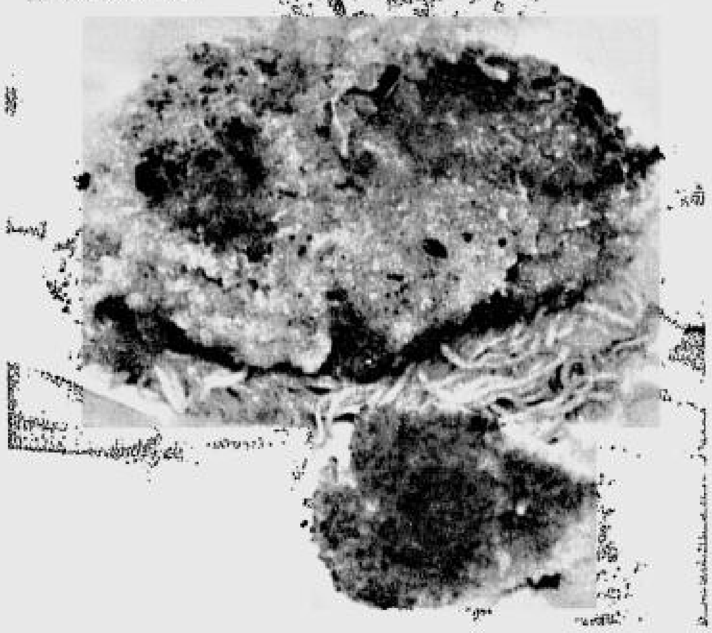
Editor Chelo Banal-Formoso

TOURNEDOS of Veal Tenderloin



Discover the rich culinary tradition of the principality of Liechtenstein

Food for royalty

Text by Dorothy MJ Ferreria
Contributor
Photos by Randy Hormillosa

IMAGINE a bowl filled with thick, bittersweet chocolate soup playfully spiced with a hint of anise, garnished with a spoonful of pineapple bits and topped with a paper-thin butter cookie sprinkled with poppy seeds for texture.

Not the usual meal ender, it is a sample of the princely dessert whipped up by guest chef Rolf Berger of the renowned Torkel Restaurant in the Rhine Valley for the Liechtenstein food festival at Mandarin Oriental Hotel's Tivoli.

An ample supply of brook chars and river perches, freshwater fishes from the waters surrounding the Torkel Restaurant, were flown in, together with a complete selection of wines from the Prince's collection to complement the menu.

Fish and seafood lovers can enjoy fillet of brook char on ramato tomatoes in basil sauce, fillet of river perch in olive coat on champagne and grain mustard sauce, fillet of pike perch gratinated with red wine butter and fillet of rouget in crisp potato coat served on sour cream sauce and sauce verte.

We had fillet of pike perch gratinated with red wine butter. The fish was fork tender. Simply plated, an interesting mild burst of flavors compensated for the lack of drama. Vaduzer Selektion Hearwingert Pinot Noir 2002 was the perfect accompaniment to this light fish dish.

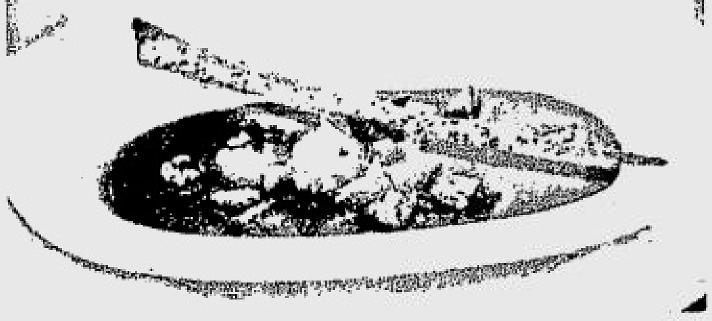
Those who prefer red meat can try the tournedos of veal tenderloin flavored with acacia honey in curry cream sauce. Sitting on a bed of crispy, fine egg noodles, the meat by itself, even without the sauce, is already outstanding. But the meat, cooked to medium rare perfection, with the sauce is a delightful savory experience even for those who do not like curry. The curry flavor was not too strong, its robust flavor most likely tempered by the addition of acacia honey that provided a hint of sweetness.

The chef mentioned that Liechtenstein produced acacia honey as the trees thrived in that part of the world.

So discover the culinary wonders of Liechtenstein and feast like the royalties of Europe through the creations of Chef Rolf Berger.

The Liechtenstein food festival at the Tivoli is ongoing until Jan. 25.

CHEFS Rolf Berger (left) and Gilles Cavalieri



ANISE-SPICED Chocolate Soup with Pineapple

WINES from the Prince's collection complement the dishes.

Mag-merienda Araw-araw!
P20

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JANUARY 15 THURSDAY

The Maya Kitchen
CULINARY ARTS CENTER

Money-Monkey Career and Business Classes

Swing high from a booming business in the year of the monkey with some help from The Maya Kitchen Culinary Arts Center. Enroll in their classes and be learned in the art of cooking and baking. Also, become familiarized with the intricacies of food service operations such as catering, restaurant and many more. Check out the schedule below.

Restaurant Operations: Jan. 17 (Sat) 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. Kitchen organization, cycle menu planning, costing, cost control, purchasing, labor, payroll, inventory, and restaurant works, menu presentation of new popular restaurant, proven techniques on profitable service operations with free lunch. P1,500

Baking with Mixes: Jan. 17 (Sat) 1:30-5 p.m. Cappuccino Cream Cheese Bars, Grand Marnier Brownie Kisses, Fresh Orange Cake, Crema de Fruta, and Lollipop Cookies. Bonus: Brownie Meringue. P750

Japanese Cooking: Jan. 24 (Sat) 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Miso Soup, Mixed Tempura, Sukiyaki, Kamameshi; assorted sushi: Kappamaki, Tekamaki, California Maki and Nigiri. P1,000. Free Cook Book.

Catering: Feb. 7 (Sat) 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Technical and legal aspects of operations, costing quantification, portion control, licensing requirements, proper hygiene and sanitation and safety aspects in food preparation, buffet table set-up flow, sourcing, actual preparation of catering dishes such as Morcon, Baked Macaroni, All-Meat Paella, Galantina, 30-minute Soy Chicken, Roast Pork, special fried rice and dessert. P1,500

Pre-Valentine Bar Chow: Feb. 7 (Sat) 1:30 -5 p.m. Crispy Crablet with Herb Dressing, Spinach Crackling with Wasabe Dressing, Buffalo Wings, Hot & Spicy Chicken Tail, Sizzling Mushroom Gambas Style. P750

Gulaman Delights: Feb. 7 (Sat) 3:00-6 p.m. Cathedral Window, Almond Gulaman Taho & Cooler, Buko-Pandan Jello, Fruity Chewy Salad, Coffee Mousse. P500

CERTIFICATE COURSES WITH HANDS-ON (Limited enrolment, pre-registration required)

Cooking I (Basic): Jan. 20-23 or Feb. 3-6 (Tue-Fri) 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Proper Hygiene; Sanitation and Safety; Nutrition and Nutritional Cooking; Stocks, Soups and Sauces and its 1001 application, Product Identification viz meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, fruits and vegetables, common herbs and spices; Purchasing; Marketing and Proper Storage; Menu Planning; Simple Garnish and Plate Presentation. Plus actual cooking workshop on the preparation of dishes from appetizer to dessert. P3,000

Baking I (Basic): Jan. 28-30 or Feb. 11-13 (W-F) 1:30-5 p.m. Techniques in preparing basic pie crust, different types of cakes, quick bread, yeast breads and more. P2,000

Advanced Baking: Jan. 24 & 31 OR Feb. 21 & 28 (Sat) 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Baking ingredients and their functions, baker's percentage/math, Actual preparation of specialty cookies, pies, Danish/puff pastries, butter type cake, sponge, chiffon type, bread and dough production; no time versus straight, and sponge and dough type. Baking magic with prepared mixes. P3,000

Cake Decorating (Basic): Jan. 24 & 31 (Sat) 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Lecture-workshop on fundamentals of cake decorating; coloring, designing, template, icing (boiled, butter, caramel, chocolate, sugar icing); basic borders, jelly lettering, basic flower making and bunching and motif. Free decorating tips. P2,000

For inquiries, visit the Maya Kitchen (Tuesdays thru Saturdays) at 8th floor, Liberty Building, A. Arnaiz Ave. (Pasay Road), Makati City or call tel. 892-1185 or 892-5011 loc. 108, or e-mail us at *mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph*

WOW PHILIPPINES
BIYAHE TAYO

MAKI-INDAK SA ATI-ATIHAN FESTIVAL!

Ngayong taon, makikipista ang Bonamine sa Kalibo, Aklan! May banda ang Bonamine na tutugtog saan-saan, at mga ati-atihang makikipag-yugyugan sa daan. Ang saya-saya talaga!

Pero tandaan, pagbiyahe papuntang Aklan, magbaon ng kontra-biyahilo Bonamine Chewables para mas masaya during fiesta!

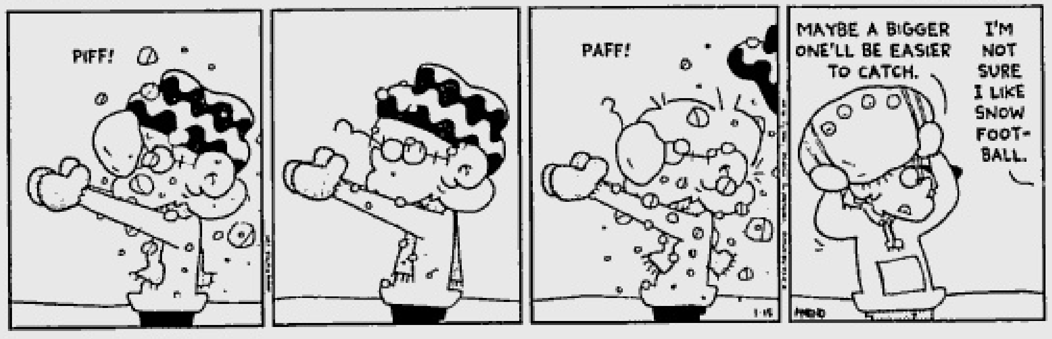
Hala bira! Hala, mag-Bonamine Chewables na!

WOWPHILIPPINES
BIYAHE Tayo!
THE BONAMINE TRAVEL ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

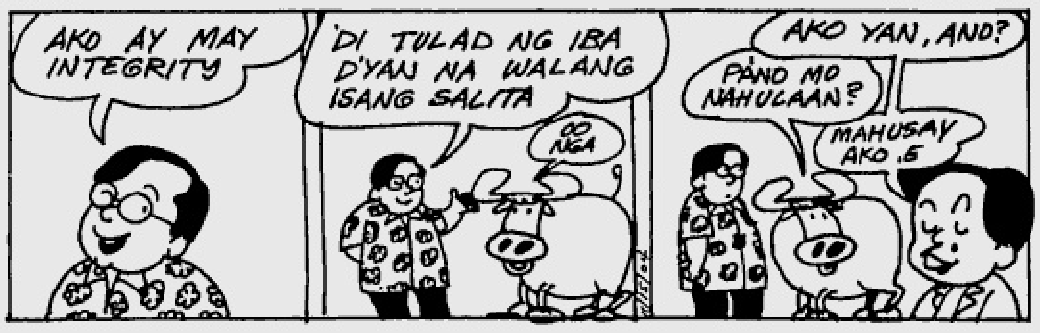
Meclizine HCl
Bonamine*
Mas enjoy ang biyahe 'pag ready!

If symptoms persist, consult your doctor.

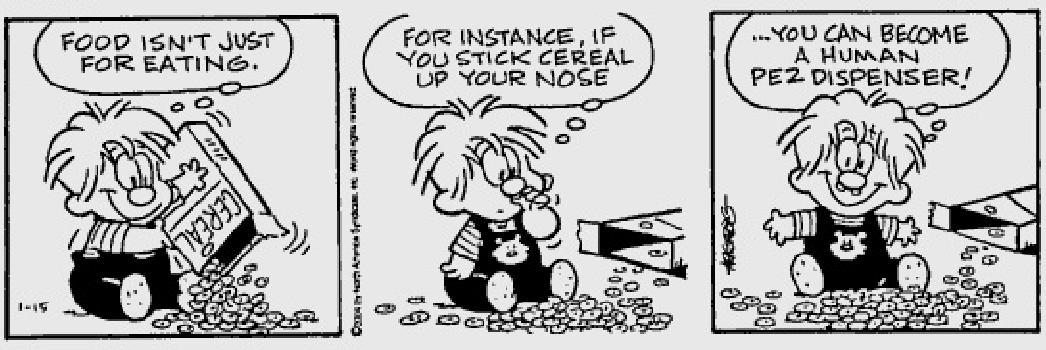
FOXTROT BY BILL AMEND


PIFF!
PAFF!
MAYBE A BIGGER ONE'LL BE EASIER TO CATCH.
I'M NOT SURE I LIKE SNOW FOOTBALL.
1-15

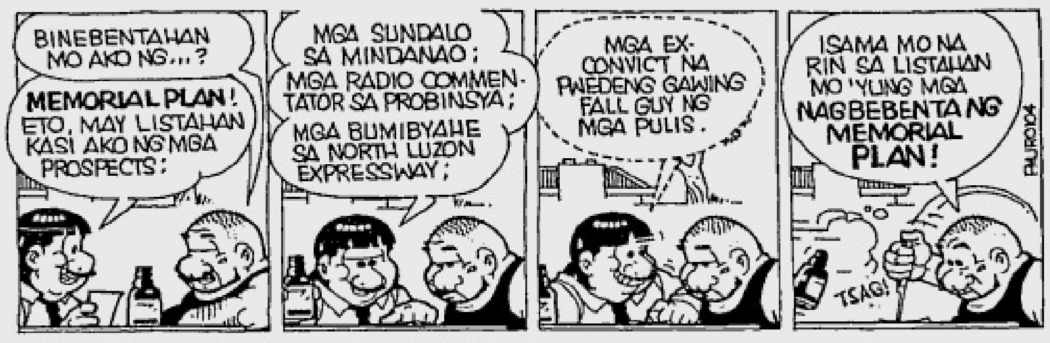
A. LIPIN BY JESS ABRERA


AKO AY MAY INTEGRITY
'DI TULAD NG IBA D'YAN NA WALANG ISANG SALITA
OO NGA
AKO YAN, ANO?
PANO MO NAHULAAN?
MAHUSAY AKO 'E

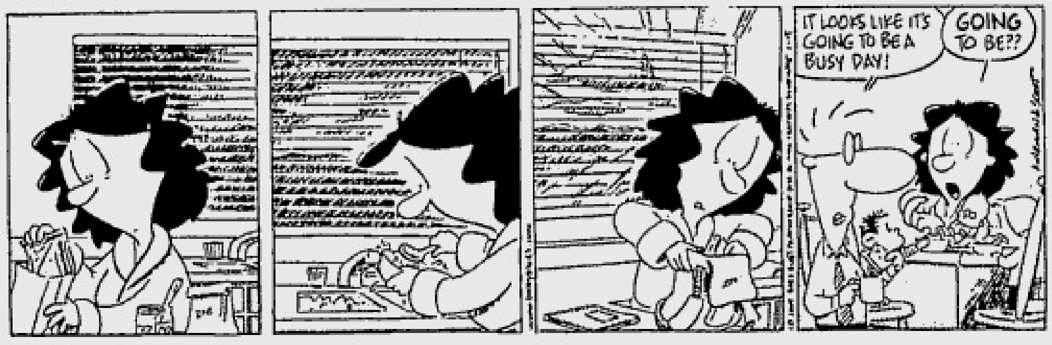
MARVIN BY TOM ARMSTRONG


FOOD ISN'T JUST FOR EATING.
CEREAL
1-15
FOR INSTANCE, IF YOU STICK CEREAL UP YOUR NOSE
...YOU CAN BECOME A HUMAN PEZ DISPENSER!

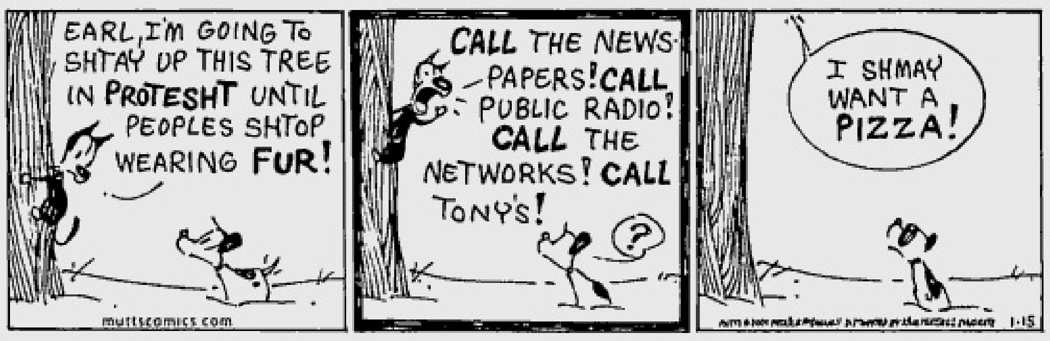
PUGAD BABOY BY P.M. JUNIOR


BINEBENTAHAN MO AKO NG...?
MEMORIAL PLAN! ETO, MAY LISTAHAN KASI AKO NG MGA PROSPECTS:
MGA SUNDALO SA MINDANAO; MGA RADIO COMMENTATOR SA PROBINSYA;
MGA BUMIBYAHE SA NORTH LUZON EXPRESSWAY;
MGA EX-CONVICT NA PWEDENG GAWING FALL GUY NG MGA PULIS.
ISAMA MO NA RIN SA LISTAHAN MO 'YUNG MGA NAGBEBENTA NG MEMORIAL PLAN!
TSAG!
PMJR004

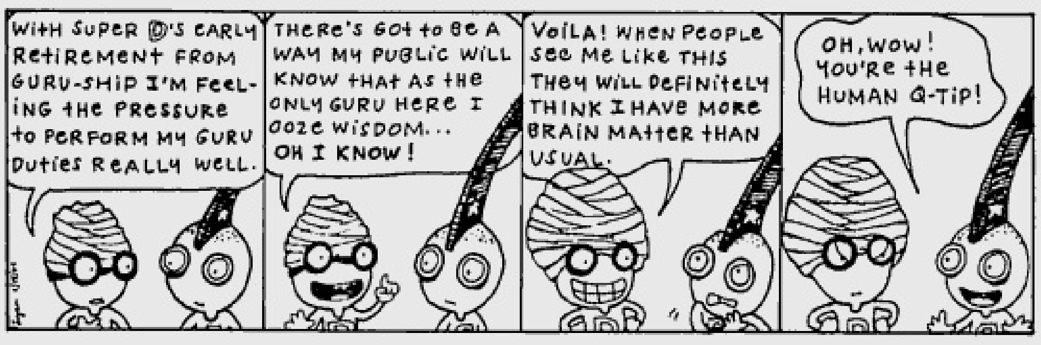
BABY BLUES BY JERRY SCOTT


IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING TO BE A BUSY DAY!
GOING TO BE??

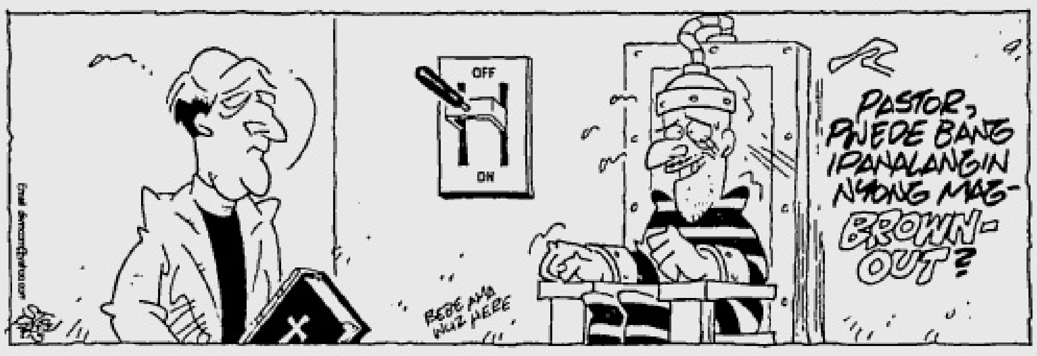
MUTTS BY PATRICK McDONNELL


EARL, I'M GOING TO SHTAY UP THIS TREE IN PROTESHT UNTIL PEOPLES SHTOP WEARING FUR!
muttscomics.com
CALL THE NEWSPAPERS! CALL PUBLIC RADIO! CALL THE NETWORKS! CALL TONY'S!
?
I SHMAY WANT A PIZZA!
1-15

ATOMO AND WEBOY BY LYRA GARCELLANO


WITH SUPER D'S EARLY RETIREMENT FROM GURU-SHIP I'M FEELING THE PRESSURE TO PERFORM MY GURU DUTIES REALLY WELL.
THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY MY PUBLIC WILL KNOW THAT AS THE ONLY GURU HERE I OOZE WISDOM... OH I KNOW!
VOILA! WHEN PEOPLE SEE ME LIKE THIS THEY WILL DEFINITELY THINK I HAVE MORE BRAIN MATTER THAN USUAL.
OH, WOW! YOU'RE THE HUMAN Q-TIP!

DIVINE COMEDY BY STEVEN PABALINAS


OFF
ON
BEBE AMB WUZ HERE
PASTOR, PWEDE BANG IPANALANGIN NYONG MAG-BROWN-OUT?

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You are idealistic, even heroic. You will champion any cause dear to your heart. However, you are also pleasure-loving. Friendships matter deeply to you, but you are careful about whom you allow close to you. You can make a difference in the lives of others. The year ahead is full of construction and hard work. **Birthdate of:** Martin Luther King Jr., civil-rights activist; Gene Krupa, drummer; Andrea Martin, comic/actress.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Your ability to gain agreement from large institutions and even the government is quite good today. Don't hesitate to push your personal agenda with officials.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Friends are ready to help today, in part because you are particularly convincing. Everything having to do with the law, higher education and travel goes extremely well now.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Your ability to do research and seek out answers for questions that you have is hot today! Go after anything you want to learn more about. You will find solutions to old problems.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): This is a lovely day to enjoy casual banter and social occasions with friends and partners. Your appreciation of beauty is very keen today. Put yourself in beautiful surroundings

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Don't be afraid to tell loved ones how much you care for them. Too often, we let this sort of thing being taken for granted. Show your affection for others today.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Your creative abilities are excellent today! Don't be afraid to tinker with things or tweak your surroundings. You're full of good ideas now.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): You want to use your mind for leisure pursuits such as reading, writing, enjoying art, having pleasant conversations and casual window-shopping. You just want to poke along and have fun.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Today definitely favors negotiations, deals, sales, marketing and all kinds of buying or selling. Mutual exchanges are beneficial. People are pleasantly cooperative.

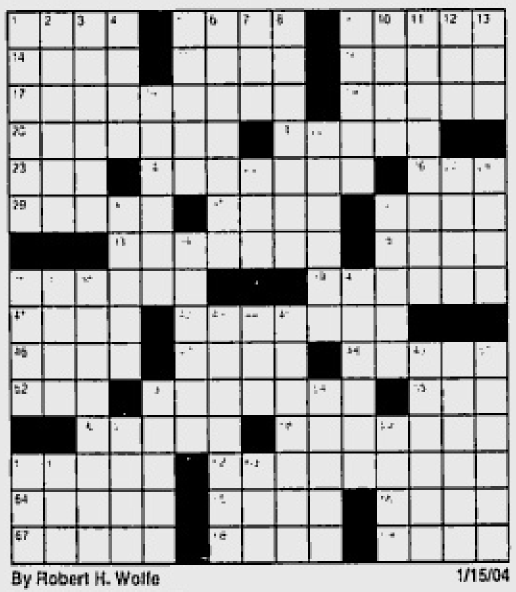
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): This is a good day to make money. Trust your money-making ideas, and don't be afraid to make suggestions at work. You're in the zone!

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): You're more in touch than usual with your feelings today. This allows you to appreciate those in your life who are close to you. (Don't wait until you lose someone to come to this realization.)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): Time spent in solitude will please you today. You need to quiet your mind sometimes. Too many hectic surroundings and technological stimulations can fry your brain.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Enjoy good times with a special friend today. Plan to meet someone for lunch, coffee or a drink. You are a social creature, and you need social feedback.

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Robert H. Wolfe
North Woodmere, NY

1/15/04

ACROSS

1 1953 Leslie Caron film
5 Short-lived elementary particle
9 Low joint
14 Arkin or Sandler
15 Part of A.D.
16 Cruise ship
17 Bum who stitches endlessly?
19 Vegetable to cry over
20 Farm vehicle
21 Religious belief
23 Tours season
24 Wrestling hold
26 Pops
29 Kind of motor or mechanism
31 Salacious stare
32 Wealthy
33 Pacific coast mollusk
35 Sound reflection
36 Examine in detail
39 Bent into a tight curl
41 Pizzeria fixture
42 Unrestrained
46 Etta or the comics
47 "__ la Douce"
48 Money lending
52 Period of history
53 More peaceful
55 Classical leader
56 Busy
58 Shone
60 Blanched
62 Future sutures, apparently?
64 Olfactory triggers
65 Thicket unit
66 Plane or saw
67 Prolix
68 Burn a bit
69 Sacred chests

DOWN

1 Whip strokes
2 Imagine
3 Attorney
4 Apple PC
5 Chaplain
6 Put on the hard drive
7 Half and half?
8 So, to the next issue
9 "All __ the Watchtower"
10 September's number
11 Criticize choice of stitching?
12 Zodiac cat
13 European eagle
18 Fat cats
22 Aha!
25 Antique auto
27 Aspirin target
28 Wearing shoes
30 Brag about
32 Tears
34 Eagles' nests
36 Jab
37 At any time
38 Seller fixing stitching anew?
40 Hardens
43 Transfixes
44 Fr. woman's title
45 Hypothetical supercontinent
49 Cast off
50 Nike rival
51 Calls to the Alps
53 Spumous
54 Bernstein or Rice
57 Nebbish
59 __ boy!
60 Mil. captive
61 Fuss
63 Before, once upon a time

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

C	H	I	N	■	W	I	L	M	A	■	D	E	S	K
C	A	N	O	P	E	N	E	R	S	■	U	L	E	E
C	A	R	R	I	E	F	I	S	H	E	R	M	E	N
P	S	I	■	T	K	O	S	■	■	I	H	O	P	S
■	■	■	A	O	L	■	■	J	S	G	A	■	■	■
J	O	H	N	N	Y	B	E	N	C	H	M	A	R	K
U	N	I	T	S	■	E	L	I	O	T	■	F	O	E
M	A	N	E	■	A	V	A	S	T	■	C	O	A	L
B	I	T	■	S	P	I	R	O	■	S	L	U	R	P
O	R	S	O	N	B	E	A	N	S	T	A	L	K	S
■	■	■	B	O	S	S	■	■	I	A	N	■	■	■
A	C	E	R	B	■	■	S	I	M	I	■	I	D	S
T	O	R	I	S	P	E	L	L	I	N	G	B	E	E
O	D	I	E	■	S	N	A	I	L	S	P	A	C	E
M	A	N	N	■	T	E	P	E	E	■	A	R	O	D

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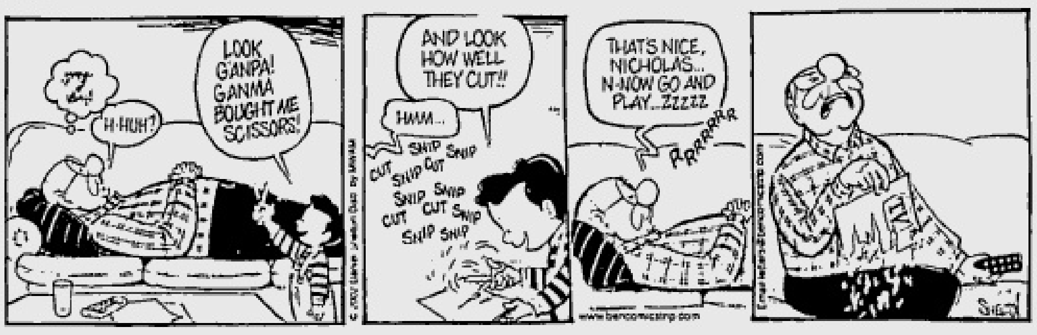
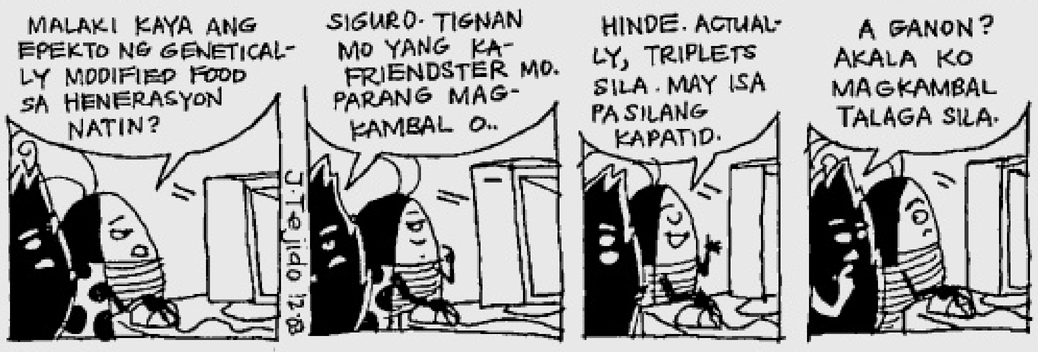
1/15/04

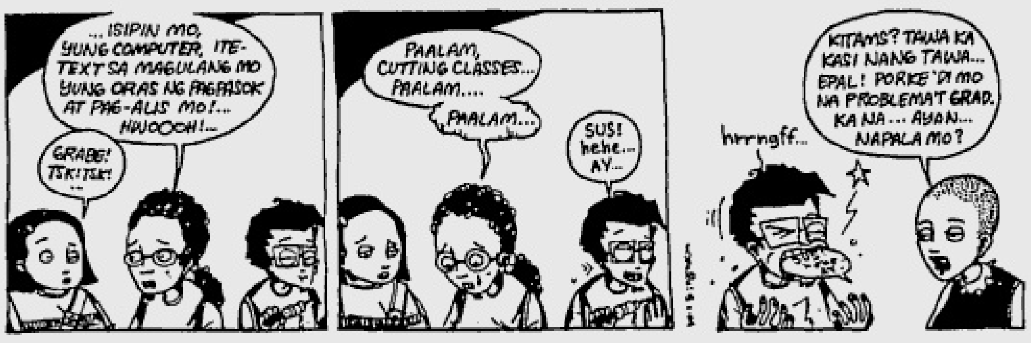
BEN BY DANIEL SHELTON


H-HUH?
LOOK G'ANPA! GANMA BOUGHT ME SCISSORS!
AND LOOK HOW WELL THEY CUT!!
HMM...
SNIP CUT SNIP CUT SNIP SNIP SNIP CUT CUT SNIP SNIP SNIP
THAT'S NICE, NICHOLAS... N-NOW GO AND PLAY...ZZZZZ
RRRRRRR
www.bencomicstrip.com

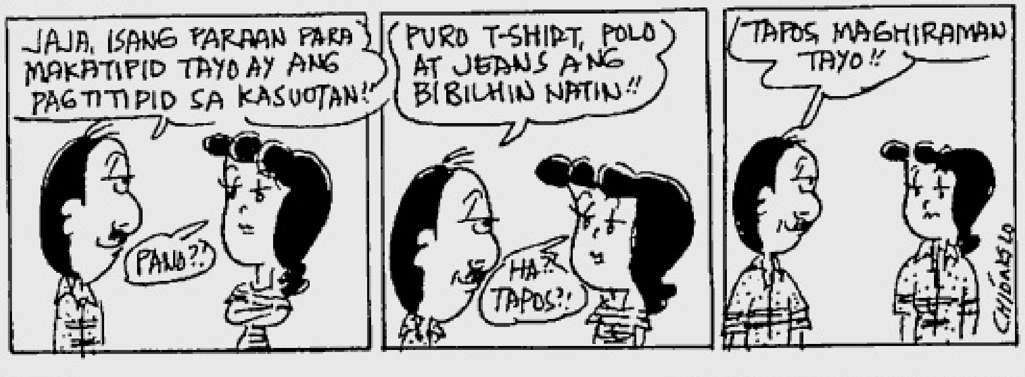
MIKROKOSMOS BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


MALAKI KAYA ANG EPEKTO NG GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD SA HENERASYON NATIN?
J. Tejido 12.8
SIGURO. TIGNAN MO YANG KA-FRIENDSTER MO. PARANG MAGKAMBAL O..
HINDE. ACTUALLY, TRIPLETS SILA. MAY ISA PA SILANG KAPATID.
A GANON? AKALA KO MAGKAMBAL TALAGA SILA.

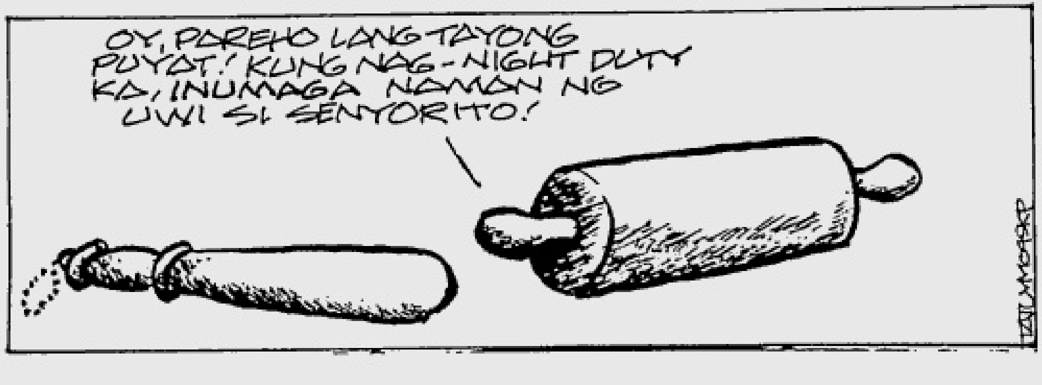
KIKO MACHINE BY MANIX ABRERA


...ISIPIN MO, YUNG COMPUTER, ITE-TEXT SA MAGULANG MO YUNG ORAS NG PAGPASOK AT PAG-ALIS MO!... HUUOOOH!...
GRABE! TSK! TSK!
PAALAM, CUTTING CLASSES... PAALAM....
PAALAM...
SUS! hehe... AY...
hrrngff...
KITAMS? TAWA KA KASI NANG TAWA... EPAL! PORKE 'DI MO NA PROBLEMA'T GRAD. KA NA... AYAN... NAPALA MO?

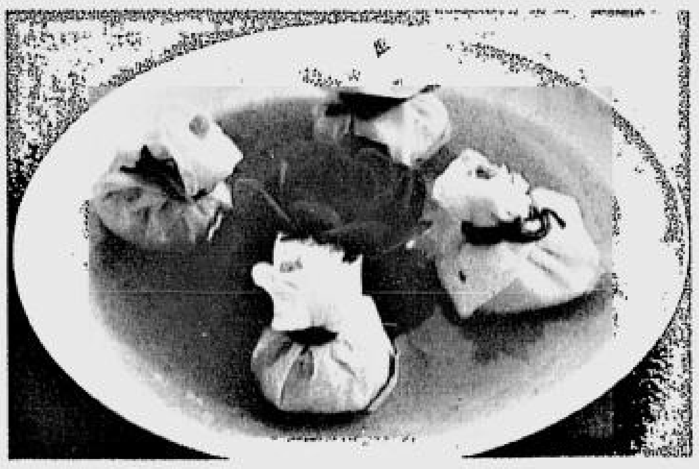
LOVEKNOTS BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


JAJA, ISANG PARAAN PARA MAKATIPID TAYO AY ANG PAGTITIPID SA KASUOTAN!
PANO?!
PURO T-SHIRT, POLO AT JEANS ANG BIBILHIN NATIN!!
HA?! TAPOS?!
TAPOS MAGHIRAMAN TAYO!!
CHIONGLO

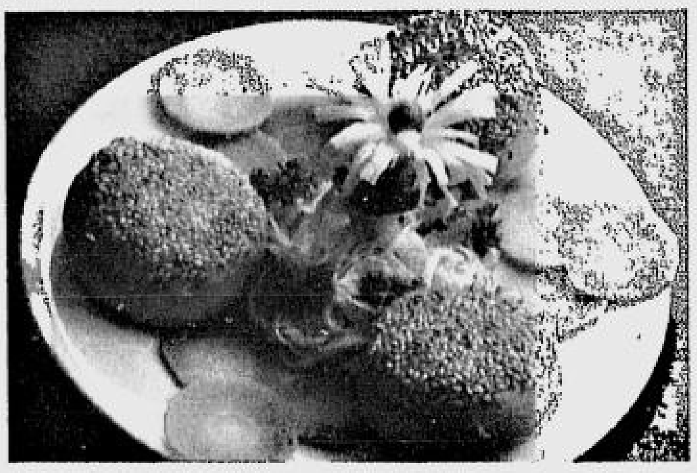
TULDOK BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


OY, PAREHO LANG TAYONG PUYAT! KUNG NAG-NIGHT DUTY KA, INUMAGA NAMAN NG UWI SI SENYORITO!

STEAMED Lapu-Lapu with Chinese Jam and Shiitake Mushrooms



CHICKEN Dumplings in Polongchay Sauce



TARO Puff

Celebrating CANTONESE cuisine

Kwang Tong in Glorietta 4 serves fresh, high-quality, made-to-order Chinese fare in a stylish setting

Text by Rowena C. Burgos
Photos by Romy Homillada

A CHINESE proverb tells us that in order to become a good cook, one must first be a good matchmaker who understands harmony and the marriage of flavors.

The kitchen of Kwang Tong has one such matchmaker, chef Nip Sing Hing.

"He has great talent when it comes to professional, traditional Chinese cooking, especially Cantonese cuisine," says George Pua, president of Kwang Tong.

Before coming over to the Philippines, chef Nip was one of Hong Kong's finest chefs, Pua says, with over 34 years of cooking experience. His creations have graced the tables of both the Heritage Hotel and Treasure Seafood Restaurant in the former crown colony, where he served as executive chef.

"Trained by master chefs in Hong Kong, his authentic Cantonese dishes will truly challenge your appetite," Pua says.

Like any Cantonese menu, that of Kwang Tong presents a wide variety of dishes made from meat, poultry, fish, seafood and vegetables.

"Chicken is a celebrity food among Cantonese eaters. A single chicken can be used to prepare several dishes," Pua says.

The most familiar Chinese dishes originated from the Cantonese cuisine, he adds. As most of its residents originate from the Guangdong province where Guangzhou (Canton) is located, Hong Kong is the world capital for this style of cooking.

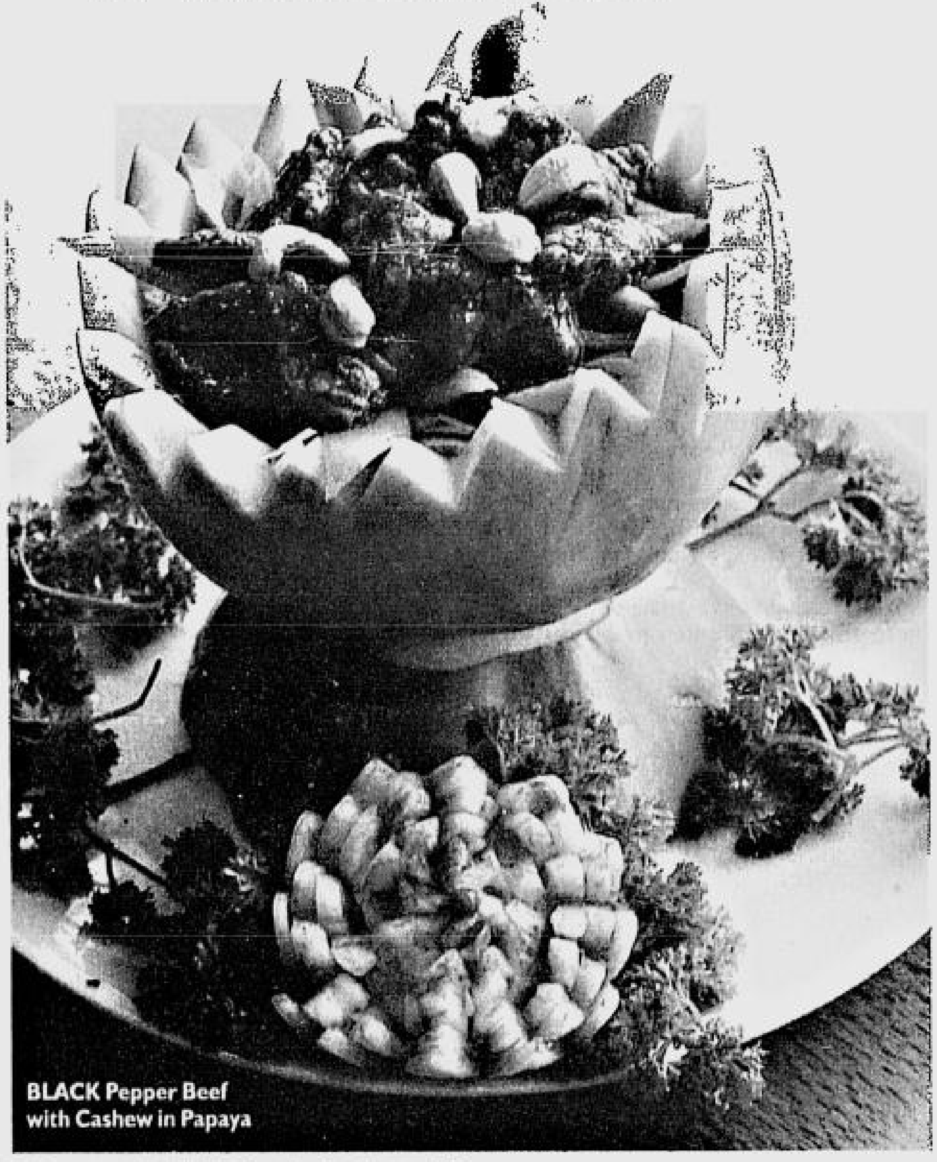
"The Cantonese are very finicky when it comes to the freshness of their food. Even the amount of time taken for a live, swimming fish to be placed on a plate is kept to a minimum."

Light cooking

Cantonese cooking is somewhat lighter than most regional Chinese cuisine. Preparation methods usually involve stir-frying in shallow water or oil in a wok. As cooking time is short, the flavors and nutrition of the food is preserved.

Vegetable and fish dishes are often steamed without the use of too much oil. Sauces made from ingredients like ginger, garlic, onion, vinegar and sugar are complemented to enhance flavors.

Seafood is the next best delicacy at Kwang Tong. Some of the popular dishes include fresh-steamed fish with ginger and onion topped with a dash of soy sauce and sesame oil, shrimps cooked or steamed in black-bean sauce and shark's fin soup.



BLACK Pepper Beef with Cashew in Papaya

KWANG Tong president George Pua and chef Nip Sing Hing

Dim sum, a delectable palate of little snacks, is, without a doubt, a trademark food in Cantonese cuisine. The most popular dim sum items are shrimp dumpling, pork dumpling, steamed spareribs, spring rolls and steamed rice flour rolls with pork, beef or shrimp.

"It is Cantonese cooking which comes to mind when thinking of Chinese food. Waves of emigration from the mid-19th century have made this the most popular of Chinese cuisines," Pua says.

Stylish yet affordable

Open daily from 11 a.m.-11 p.m., the 170-seater Kwang Tong (tels. 814-0945/ 814-0952) at the second floor of Glorietta 4, Ayala Center, Makati, was designed by Pua's nephew, architect Michael Pua.

He says the interiors were inspired by the movies "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "Hero." The walls of the restaurant display photos of Filipino models dressed in ancient Chinese costumes.

Red lanterns that adorn the diner came from Shanghai. A Buddha statue seating in a corner was bought by Pua's mom in China. The cool colors of yellow and green define the place.

According to Pua, Kwang Tong is the Mandarin pronunciation of Guangdong and Canton.

Kwang Tong currently offers affordable set menus for 6-12 persons, which are priced from P1,380-P10,000.

"Despite the fact that we have a chef from Hong Kong, the prices are reasonable. We don't even charge a 10-percent service fee," says Pua.

"It has been my dream to create a casual, consumer-friendly restaurant that serves fresh, high-quality, made-to-order Chinese cuisine in a stylish setting with table service," he adds.

Kwang Tong is the result of that dream.

E-mail the author at rburgos@inquirer.com.ph

PANDAN Crêpe

MANGO Sago

FRIED Scallops with Crab Roe Sauce

Baking and cake decorating classes

CULINARY expert, cookbook author and food columnist Dorothy MJ Ferreria of Dorothy's Cooking School offers hands-on and demonstration classes in cooking, baking and cake decorating starting today.

Schedule follows:

Baby Cakes, Jan. 15: a baking demonstration class featuring cakes in miniature; Something Old and Something New, Jan. 17, a cooking demonstration class featuring updated classic dishes; Fondant Cakes in Miniature, Jan. 19-21; Birthday Cake Workshop, Jan. 23-25; and Gumpaste Flowers Workshop, Jan. 26-28.

Those enrolling in all three cake-decorating classes will get discounted rates.

Due to numerous requests, hands-on whole day baking classes featuring various cakes and homemade breads will be held Feb. 3, 5 and 7. Call 7217735 or e-mail dorothyferreria@skyinet.net.

Start a food business in 2004

WELCOME the Year of the Monkey with a new food business. Learn the art of cooking and baking and other food-related endeavors by taking courses at the Maya Kitchen Culinary Arts Center.

Whether you are a novice who wants to learn the ropes of managing a small restaurant or a bakery, or a seasoned business-minded individual who wants a change in careers, these courses will definitely be of help:

Restaurant Operations, Jan. 17, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.—Learn various restaurant tasks like kitchen organization, cycle menu planning, costing, cost control, purchasing, labor, payroll, inventory and restaurant works, menu presentation, and proven techniques for effective service operations.

Baking with Mixes, Jan. 17, 1:30-5 p.m.—Learn how to make Cappuccino, Cream Cheese Bars, Grand Marnier Brownie Kisses, French Orange Cake, Crema de Fruta, Lollipop Cookies and a bonus recipe of Brownie Meringue.

Cooking I (Basic), Jan. 20-23 or Feb. 3-6, Tuesday-Friday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.—Topics include proper hygiene, sanitation and safety, nutrition and nutritional cooking, stocks, soups and sauces and its 1,001 applications, product identification (e.g., meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, fruits and vegetables), common herbs and spices, purchasing, marketing and proper storage, menu planning, simple garnish and plate presentation, plus an actual cooking workshop on the preparation of dishes from appetizer to dessert.

Other courses include Baking I (Basic), Jan. 28-30, Wednesday-Friday; and Advanced Baking and Cake Decorating, Jan. 24 and 31, Saturdays.

Visit the Maya Kitchen Tuesday-Saturday at the 8/F of Liberty Building A. Arnaiz Avenue, formerly Pasay Rd., Makati City. Call 8921185 or 8925011 local 108 or e-mail mayakitchen@pacific.net.ph.

APPLE Pie a la Mode

Restaurant launches recipe book

BURGOO Restaurant welcomes the New Year by launching a new menu book containing 85 original and all-time favorite dishes, as well as 10 new recipes.

The dishes include such customer favorites as the Oklahoma-Style Grilled Baby Back Ribs, Country-Style Fried Chicken, Grilled Pork Chops, Friday Fish Fry, Burgoo Stew, Hamburgoo, Seafood Caesar Salad, Supreme Pizza and Seafood Linguini.

Among the new recipes are Gambas al Ajillo, Shrimp Pomelo Salad, Shrimp and Ribs, Seafood Jambalaya, Grilled Steak a la Pobre, Blackened Salmon, Tomato-Basil Spaghetti, and three desserts: Apple Pie a la Mode, Triple Decker Dessert and Mississippi Mud Pie.

The book was a project of Burgoo's managing director Albert Alavera and general manager Eileen Ingalla-Necio.

Call 9277424, 6875254 or 8981815.

The many ways to enjoy 'tikoy'

By Dorothy MJ Ferreria
Contributor

CHINESE New Year is just a few days away so we see a lot of *tikoy* in the groceries and Chinese delis. *Tikoy* used to be just white or dark brown. With the spunky third generation Chinese, we now have *tikoy* in exciting flavors and colors such as *ube*, *pandan*, mango, melon, etc.

Tikoy is usually sliced into thin strips, dipped in beaten egg and fried. It is served as is or with honey, fruit jam or a sprinkling of sugar.

Another way to eat *tikoy* is to slice it into thin strips, wrap the strips in *lumpia* or *molo* wrapper (the size should be the same as cheese *lumpia* or *lumpiang shanghai*) and deep-fried to a golden crisp. Serve with hotcake syrup, honey or condensed milk as dipping sauce.

It really does not matter how you have your *tikoy*. The important thing is to have lots of it on the eve of Chinese New Year (Jan. 21) to invite good luck and prosperity.

This week, we have recipes for Chinese dishes to welcome the Year of The Monkey.

Almond Jelly

568 g can lychees in heavy syrup, drained
2 tbsp unflavored gelatin
1 c water
½ c white sugar
1 c fresh milk
1 tsp almond extract
Syrup:
1 c sugar
2 c water

Slice the lychees into quarters. Set aside in the refrigerator.

In a saucepan combine the gelatin, water and sugar. Mix well. Let stand for 5 minutes. Cook over low heat until the gelatin dissolves completely. Do not allow the gelatin mixture to boil so as not to weaken the power of the gelatin. Remove from heat and stir in fresh milk and almond extract.

Transfer the mixture to a square glass dish and chill until firm.

Prepare the syrup by boiling sugar and water together until the sugar dissolves completely. Allow to cool at room temperature and then chill.

When ready to serve, cut the gelatin into half-inch cubes. Arrange in dessert bowls. Top with slices of lychee and crushed ice. Pour an adequate amount of prepared syrup and serve immediately.

If desired, use cubes of ripe mango instead of canned lychee.

Oriental Chicken Salad

10 pcs wonton skin sliced into ¼-inch strips
oil for frying
3 c boiled and cubed chicken meat
2 ½ c shredded iceberg lettuce (Baguio lettuce)
1 c mung bean sprouts (*togue*), blanched
½ c carrots sliced into thin strips
¼ c chopped spring onions
Dressing:
2 tbsp sesame seeds (*linga*)
¼ c corn oil
3 tbsp vinegar
2 tbsp white sugar
1 tbsp sesame oil
salt and pepper to taste

Fry wonton skins in hot oil. Drain on paper towels and set aside.

Combine the chicken and the vegetables in a salad bowl. Cover with a sheet of cling wrap and keep chilled until serving time.

When ready to serve, combine the ingredients for the dressing in a bowl. Mix well and pour over the salad. Toss gently and top with fried wonton skins.

Lemon Chicken

1 kg chicken breasts or thighs, skinned, deboned and sliced into chunks
oil for frying
Batter:
½ c cornstarch
2 c all-purpose flour
1 egg
2 c water
1 chicken bouillon cube, crumbled
Sauce:
1/3 c white sugar
1 ½ tsp fine salt
¼ c unsweetened pineapple juice
2 tbsp cornstarch
1 c water
1 tsp soy sauce
1 American lemon, sliced thinly into rounds

Heat up a generous amount of oil in a large wok or frying pan.

To prepare the batter combine the ingredients in a bowl. Mix well with a wire whisk until smooth. Dip the chicken in the batter and fry over medium heat until golden brown.

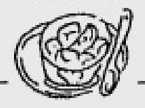
For the sauce combine the first 6 ingredients in a saucepan. Cook over medium heat until slightly thick. Remove from heat and quickly stir in the lemon slices.

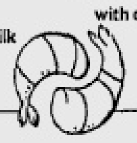
Combine the fried chicken and the sauce in a bowl, transfer to a serving platter and serve immediately.

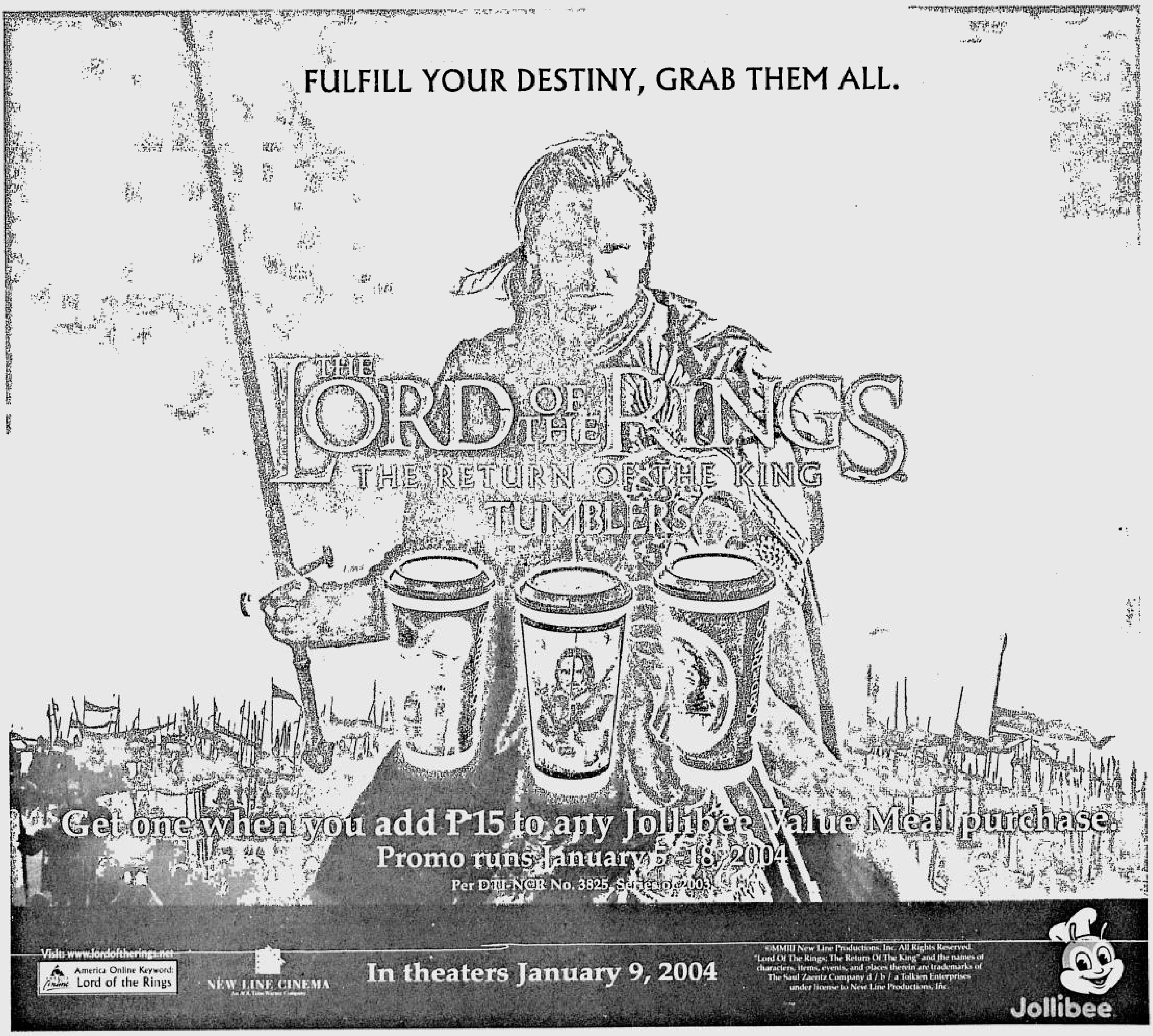
If desired, use canned pineapple chunks instead of the lemon for the sauce.

Dorothy MJ Ferreria offers cooking, baking and cake decorating classes at Dorothy's Cooking School. Call 7217735 or e-mail dorothyferreria@skyinet.net.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
MONDAY	Oatmeal Toasted *pandesal* with *kesong puti* Spanish sardines Coffee, chocolate or tea Bananas	Sweet and sour fish Vegetable chopsuey Rice Almond jelly	Tossed greens with vinegar and oil dressing Chicken *afritada* Rice Pineapple upsidedown cake
TUESDAY	Omelet with cheddar cheese and spring onions Loaf bread Vienna sausage Coffee or fruit juice Papaya with calamansi	Pork *pata sinigang* with *gabi* and *kangkong* Rice Watermelon	Yang chow fried rice Lemon chicken *Minatamis na saba* with *langka* and *sago*
WEDNESDAY	Cereal and milk Chicken hotdog Hotdog buns with mayo Coffee, fruit juice or iced tea	*Adobong pusit* *Gisadong upo* Rice Leche flan	Instant cream of asparagus soup Spanish paella Fresh fruit platter
THURSDAY	Hotcake or waffles with butter and hotcake syrup Pan grilled spam or ham Coffee, chocolate or iced tea Sliced oranges	Clam soup Beef *morcon* Rice Orange glazed *kamote*	Spaghetti with pesto sauce *Embotido* Garlic bread Mocha ice cream
FRIDAY	Tuna sandwich Boiled eggs Coffee, chocolate or carrot juice Papaya	*Rellenong talong* *Halabos na hipon* Rice Fried *tikoy* with condensed milk	Chicken *kare kare* Rice Canned fruit cocktail with crushed ice
SATURDAY	*Daing na bangus* Rice Coffee, hot chocolate or iced tea Fresh fruit platter	Beef steak with onion rings *Lumpiang ubod* Rice Brazo de Mercedes	Oriental chicken salad Pork *asado* Rice *Gulaman at sago*
SUNDAY	*Ensaymada or mamon* Pan grilled ham Cheese platter Coffee, chocolate or fruit juice Ripe mangoes with cottage cheese	*Ginataang alimasag* *Pinakbet* Rice Assorted *kakanin*	Chicken *tinola* with green papaya and *sili* leaves Rice Fresh fruit platter



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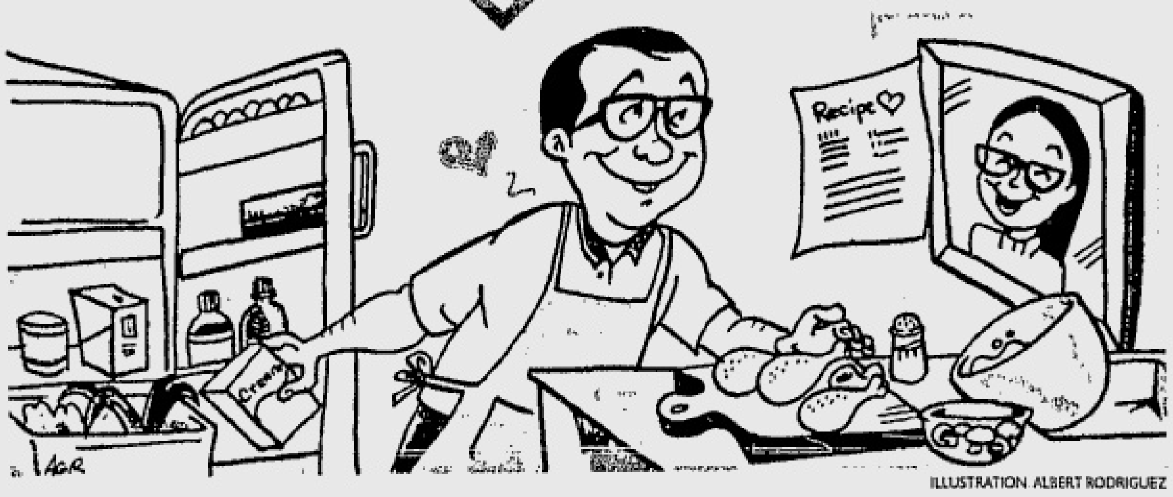

ILLUSTRATION ALBERT RODRIGUEZ

Romantics are preparing surprises for their Valentine

My favorite things and loverly recipes

KITCHEN RESCUE

Reggie Aspiras

IT'S been quite a while since I did a list of favorites. So here's another one to help you find what you need or want.

Barbecue: Michelle Santiago, 0919-8114359 or 4218212

Brazo de Mercedez and buttercake: Carmen Vargas, 8107529

Ensaimada: Maricel Cunanan, 6310798

Carpet cleaner: (to get rid of nasty food stains) Esling, 0917-4762343

Chocnut Ice Cream: Fernando Aracama of Uva, Greenbelt 3

Couscous with Merguez (Lamb Sausage): Fidel, 5259590

Chinese with a twist: Good Earth at the Fort (The Taro Stuffed Duck is excellent)

Pandan and Marshmallow Cake: Judah Liu, 8966872

Vegetables and herbs: Lolita's Farmers Market, 9112567; and Zeny's Farmers Market, 9112101

Tinapa Rice, Pakó Salad Buro, Pancit Hab-hab: Mama Rosa, Timog and Eastwood, 3726591

Birthday and wedding cakes, Cookie Faces and cup cakes: Marta Matute, 0917-5207265

Le Creuset Pots and Pans and Lavazza Coffee: Bacchus International, Edsa Shangri-la Hotel

Food magazines: Vogue, Delicious, Bon Appetit, Food and Wine (Emerald Headway, 6474744 or Mio Mag, SM Megamall, Glorietta 3 and SM Baguio)

Fruit, vegetable and herb seeds: Ramgo, 3713482

Wholesale imported meat, seafood etc.: 2568831

Deli (specialty gourmet food shops): Santis, 8941293, 7226274, 6388969, 4146369, 8403771; Gourmand, Net One Bldg at the Fort; Terry's, 7297906

Pate with Pork Aspic: Simple Pleasures, 7574212 to 13

Hamburger: Brothers Burgers and Wham

Isol Barbecue: Countryside, Katipunan Ave.

Crabs: Violex Farmer's Market, 4217659 or 9134247

The Christmas season is over and Valentine's Day is less than a month away. I decided that Kitchen Rescue be the first to come up with a Valentine tribute. To all letter senders and all of us, let's continue to believe in happy endings and in falling in love.

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you love, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what you will do morning, and evening, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what gives you joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.

(Attributed to Pedro Arrupe, S.J., 1907-1991, superior general of the

MY FAVORITE/ E2

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Sylvia Reynoso Gala
GOLD MEDALIST Academia de Gastronomos Madrid, Spain - 1964

ERNEST REYNOSO GALA
Graduate : Full Course at Thai Cooking School, Oriental Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand
Studied at Chopstick and Hongkong Town Gas Culinary Schools

Leni Reynoso-Araullo
Masters in Cake Decorating, Wilton School, Chicago, U.S.A., 1974 under Martha & Stanley Wilton
Graduate : Chicago School of Cooking and Catering
Graduate : Full Course, Thai Cooking School at the Oriental Hotel, Bangkok
Studied cooking in Europe, South America & Hongkong
Co-founder with Edna, Reynoso Cooking and Baking School, March, 1963

SATURDAYS 9:30-10:00AM ABC-5
WHAT'S COOKING @SYLVIA'S KITCHEN

JANUARY 19 - MON. 2:30-5:30 pm MONEY MAKING FASTFOOD RECIPES WONTON NOODLE SOAP; MAKI SOUP; FRIED LOMI, KUCHAY DUMPLINGS; PORK CURRY OVER RICE; SHRIMP FRIED RICE. P980

JANUARY 20 - TUE. 2:30-6:00 pm 9 SPECIAL BARBECUE. BEEF TERIYAKI IN SKEWERS; PORK SPARERIBS WITH HOISIN SAUCE; MAGNOLIA CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS IN HONEY SAUCE; (SATE AJAM) CHICKEN IN SKEWERS IN PEANUT SAUCE; BEEF RIBS WITH PEKING NOODLES; DELICIOUS PORK SPARERIBS; KOREAN BEEF BARBEQUE; NASI GORENG(INDONESIAN FRIED RICE) FERNANDO MIGUEL ERENETA'S CHICKEN HONEY; THE BEST PORK BARBEQUE WITH SPECIAL PEANUT SAUCE P980

JANUARY 21 - WED. 2:30-5:30 pm POPULAR DELICIOUS DIMSUM DISHES PLUS AUTHENTIC HONGKONG CHINESE CONGEE (LUGAW WITH DIFFERENT TOPPINGS) FISH FILLET; PORK SZECHUAN; VEGETABLES; BOLA-BOLA; SHRIMP PORK LIVER, KIDNEY, PIG-STOMACH). DIMSUM STYLE CHICKEN FEET, PORK SPARERIBS, SHRIMPS ON TOAST, BUCHI W/ SESAME SEEDS. P980

JANUARY 22 - THUR. 2:30-5:30 pm DELICIOUS RESTAURANT SPECIALTIES YOU WILL LOVE TO DO AT HOME! GARLIC ROASTED MAGNOLIA CHICKEN WITH PEPPER STEAK SAUCE; MONTEREY BEEF TENDERLOIN CUBES SALPICADO; FETTUCINE WITH 3 DIFFERENT SAUCES - PESTO (GARLIC BASIL); BLACK SQUID INK; CREAMY MAYO CHEESE. HIGHLANDS SALAD WITH OLIVES AND BLUE CHEESE DRESSINGS; HOT CARAMEL BANANA FUDGE BROWNIE PIE WITH CREAM. PLUS BONUS RECIPES OF CENTURY TUNA BURGERS; BEEF BURGERS WITH DIFFERENT DRESSINGS. P980

JANUARY 23 - FRI. 2:30 - 5:30 pm MONEY MAKING FAST FOOD RECIPES! YUMMY CHICKEN INASAL; S & R STYLE HERBED ROASTED MAGNOLIA CHICKEN; CAJUN BURGERS WITH SPECIAL SAUCE; SPICY MAGNOLIA CHICKEN BUGERS; BAKED POTATO CHIP MAGNOLIA CHICKEN BREASTS WITH PESTO LINGUINNE. P980

JANUARY 24 - SAT. 2:30 - 6:00 pm POPULAR JAPANESE DISHES 1 DELICIOUS KAMAMESHI YAKITORI: (JAPANESE CHICKEN BARBECUE IN SKEWERS) TONKATSU; (BREADED PORKSHOPS); GRILLED/JAPANESE BEEFSTEAKS WITH BELL PEPPER & MONGO SPROUTS, MISO SOUP, SUNOMONO WITH DILIS. VERY DELICIOUS SUKIYAKI P980

JANUARY 26 & FEBRUARY 2 (2 MONDAYS) 2:30 - 5:30 pm P1,300. MONEY MAKING CHOCOLATE FANTASIES COURSE. ALL NEW! (#1 SELLER IN MANILA) BAKED CHOCOLATE COATD POPCORNS, CREM FILLED CUPCAKES; STICKY WALNUT BROWNIES; CHUNKY CHOCO COOKIES, GERMAN STYLE FUDGY CAKE WITH ICING; CHOCOLATE TURTLE CHEESECAKE; SMOOTH CHOCOLATE MOUSSE; SYRUPY BROWNIES; WALNUT CRUNCH BROWNIES. NEW ROCKY ROAD BROWNIES; MELTS IN THE MOUTH TIRAMISU#2.

JANUARY 29 -THUR. 2:30-6:15 pm LEARN THE SOFTEST SIOPAO DOUGH EVER! THE MOST DELICIOUS SIOMAI; KUA PAO (PEKING SIOPAO WITH MEAT FILLING AND PICKED MUSTASA). FISH HEAD SOUP, CAMARON RELLENADO; QUIKIAM WITH RADISH SALAD. STEAMED LAPU-LAPU P980

JANUARY 30 - FRI. 2:30 - 6:00 pm LIGHT AND AIRY ENSAYMADAS; CHEESEROLLS, SPECIAL EGG PANDESAL, PAN DE SAL WITH FILLING; CINNAMON ROLLS. BREAD BAKING MADE EASY! P880

JANUARY 31 - SAT. 2:30 - 5:30 pm POPULAR JAPANESE DISHES II LEARN 8 DELICIOUS RECIPES! SHABU-SHABU WITH 2 SAUCES ASSORTED CRISPY TEMPURA; GRILLED PORK AND BEEF SLICE: UDON (VERY SPECIAL NOODLES) FRIED TOFUS IN SPECIAL SAUCE. BREADED CHICKEN WINGS WITH VINEGAR SAUCE, JAPANESE MIXED FRIED RICE PLUS BONUS RECIPES OF COMPLETE SUSHI BAR P980

FEBRUARY 3-TUES.-2:30-5:30 pm MAX STYLE FRIED CHICKEN; JOLLIBEE STYLE CHICKEN WITH GRAVY; CHICKEN BURGER; DELICIOUS POTATO SALAD, SIZZLING GRILLED PORK CHOPS; 4 SEASONS PUNCH, RIPE MANGO JUICE; MELON TAPIOCA WITH SAGO. GREEN MANGO JUICE P980.

FEBRUARY 4 - WED - 2 30 - 6 30 pm EASY BREADBAKING FOR WOULD BE BAKESHOP OWNERS! LEARN AND EARN NOW! - AMERICAN TASTY BREAD, MORELLA AND ERNEST BIG PAN DE SAL, HONEY BREAD; BUTTER BREAD; CHEESE BREAD; SUPERSOFT CARMELITE BREAD IN A BUNDT PAN. P880.

FEBRUARY 5 THUR -2:30-5:30 pm LEARN THE TECHNIQUES TO COOKING THE JUCIEST MONTEREY PORTERHOUSE STEAKS; BEEF TENDERLOIN STEAK ALA POBRE, DELICIOUS HOMEMADE GRAVY; CAESAR SALAD; ROAST ORANGE PORK LOIN . BEST SELLING BAKED SPAGHETTI WITH 2 SAUCES; MAKE YOUR OWN CREPES SAMURAI P980

FEBRUARY 6 - FRI. - 2:30 - 5:30 pm VERY FLANKY PORTUGUESE (MACAO) STYLE TARTS. CASUY; LANGKA; MACAPUNO; MANGO; UBE; TARTS; EMPANADA WITH SWEET FILLING; HAM-CHEESE EMPANADITAS. FOR BAKESHOP OR HOME BUSINESS. P880 ALL NEW RECIPES!

FEBRUARY 7 - SAT. 2:30 - 5:30 pm DELICIOUS CHICKEN CORDON BLEU WITH CREAMY SAUCE; PAELLA NEGRA; SPICY SQUID RINGS IN GARLIC SAUCE; DEBONNED LEMONY SOY CHICKEN ON WILD RICE; ORIENTAL SPRING ROLLS WITH SWEET CHILI SAUCE; EASY TIRAMISU P980

FEBRUARY 9 - MON. - 2:30-5:30 pm CHINESE COOKING PATA TIM (BRAISED PORK SHOULDER) SPICED CHILI CRABS; PATO TIM (BRAISED DUCK WITH VEGETABLES). SWEET AND SOUR PORK, YANCHOW FRIED RICE; SPICY PRAWNS; CANDED BANANAS DIPPED IN ICE P980

FEBRUARY 10-TUES.-2:30-6:00 pm 9 MONEY MAKING FOR TEENS AND ADULT BEGINNERS; CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES; CHOCOLATE CRINKLES; BUTTERSCOTH BROWNIES; LENGUA DE GATO. CHEWY MALLOW BARS; RUSSIAN TEA COOKIES; VIRGIE PANTELEON'S DATE WALNUT COOKIES, SPECIAL POLVORON; LEBANESE DATE BOAT TARTS. P880

FEBRUARY 12-THUR.-2:30-5:30pm OPEN A PIZZA PARLOR, LEARN TO MAKE THESE ITALIAN FAVORITES. MOZZARELLA TOPPED-BIG AND THICK CRUST PIZZA (BAKED IN A RECTANGULAR PAN); THIN CRUST PIZZA WITH DIFFERENT TOPPINGS; FETTUCINE ALFREDO; SPAGHETTI; CARBONARA; BREADED VEAL STEAKS WITH LEMON; PEACH-FILLED CREPES WITH FRUIT SAUCE. PLUS 12 BONUS RECIPES OF PASTAS AND SANDWICHES. P980

FEBRUARY 11, 18, & 25 - 3 WED. - 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 pm FONDANT ICING AND GUMPASTE FLOWERS COURSE P2,500. INCLUDING INGREDIENTS, LUNCH, SNACKS. SEE DETAILS IN OUR FEB. 10, TUES. AD. BY LENI R. ARAULLO

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FEBRUARY 15, 22, 29 SUNDAYS - 2:30 - 5:30 pm SAUSAGE MAKING COURSE I, II, III. P980. PER LESSON INCLUDING INGREDIENTS. SEE FEBRUARY 10 AD BY LENI R. ARAULLO

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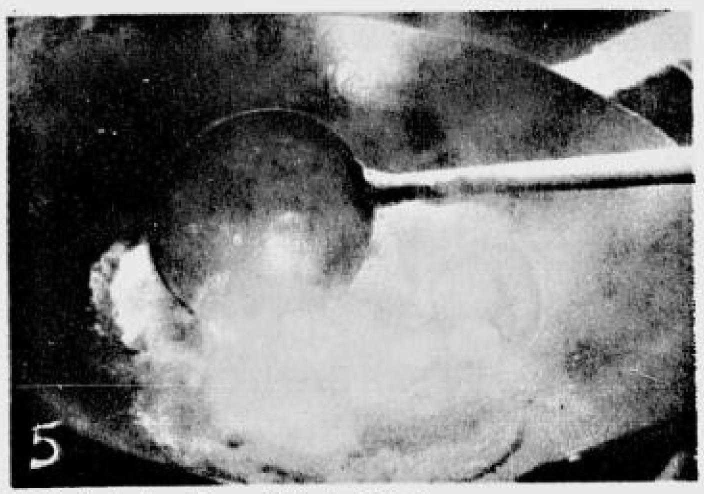
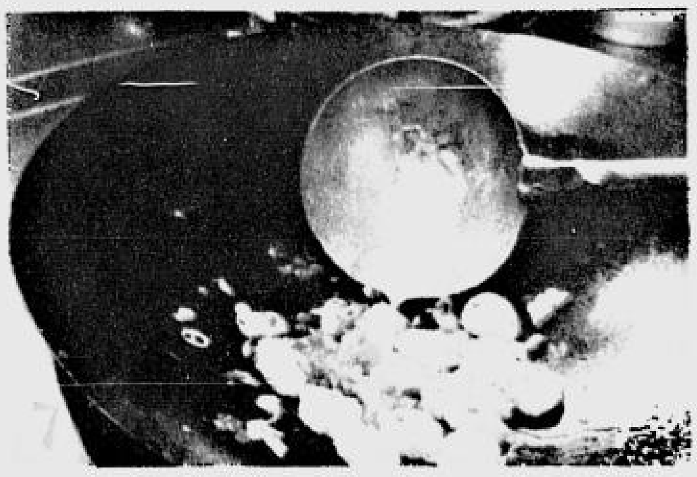


BOIL the fresh scallops until cooked. Drain.

SAUTE shallots, carrots and ginger. Then add the XO sauce, chili bean paste and mix.



ADD scallops and put some salt, chicken powder, rice wine and potato starch to thicken the sauce.

Savory seafood for the Chinese New Year

Text by Vangie Baga-Reyes
Photos by Roger Carpio

SEAFOODS are always part of traditional Chinese meals during the New Year. Many of China's ancient settlements originated near bodies of water. That's why fish and shellfish provide many of the best-loved and most important fare on the Chinese table.

According to chef Sham Yun Ming, executive chef of China Sea of The Westin Philippine Plaza (tel. 5515555), if you really want to cook the way the Chinese do, go out of your way to find the best and freshest fish and shellfish available. In some Chinese markets and restaurants, the fish are kept alive in tanks, so you really know they are fresh!

One traditional recipe that Chinese often prepare during the New Year is the Sauteed Fresh Scallops with White Mushroom in XO Sauce.

XO sauce gives flavor and richness to the dish. It is mildly spicy and is a blend of different ingredients such as dried shredded scallops, minced Chinese ham, dried shrimps, red chili peppers and other spices. It is dark brown in color and can be used in an assortment of ways—as a mix, dipping sauce, etc. XO sauce is available in major supermarkets.

The scallops and white mushrooms are sautéed with the XO sauce. Chef Sham Yun Ming says it is best to use fresh scallops in this recipe.

He says all fresh scallops should have a sweet smell and a fresh, moist sheen. They should be refrigerated immediately after purchase and used within a day or two. Frozen scallops are also generally available year-round.

Scallops benefit from brief cooking and are suitable for a variety of preparation methods including sautéing, grilling, broiling and poaching.

The broccoli here is blanched and should be cooked through, but still firm and crisp.

STEP BY STEP

Ingredients

150 g broccoli flower
100 g fresh scallops
100 g white mushrooms
chopped shallots
ginger
carrots
salt
chicken powder
sesame and soya oil
potato starch to thicken the sauce
XO sauce
chili bean paste
chicken broth
rice wine

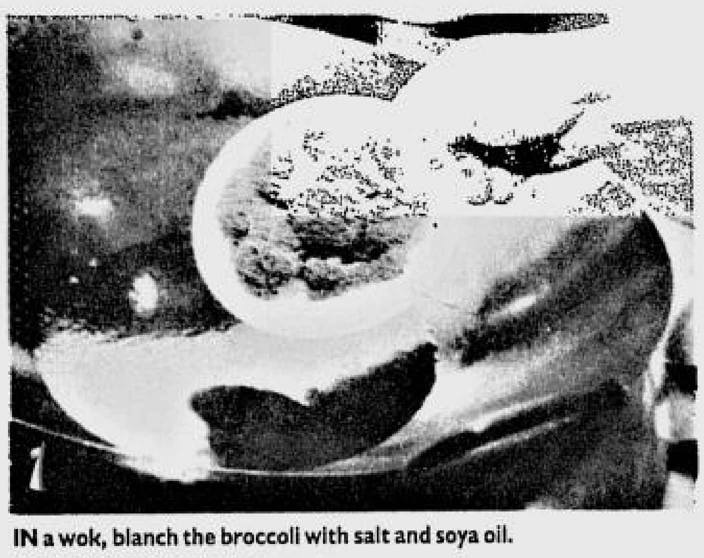
E-mail the author at vbaga@inquirer.com.ph

One traditional recipe for this time of year is the Sauteed Fresh Scallops with White Mushroom in XO Sauce

ADD potato starch to thicken the sauce. Arrange white mushrooms on the platter.

BLANCH the white mushrooms, then strain. Return mushrooms to the wok and saute with salt, chicken powder, sesame oil and chicken broth.

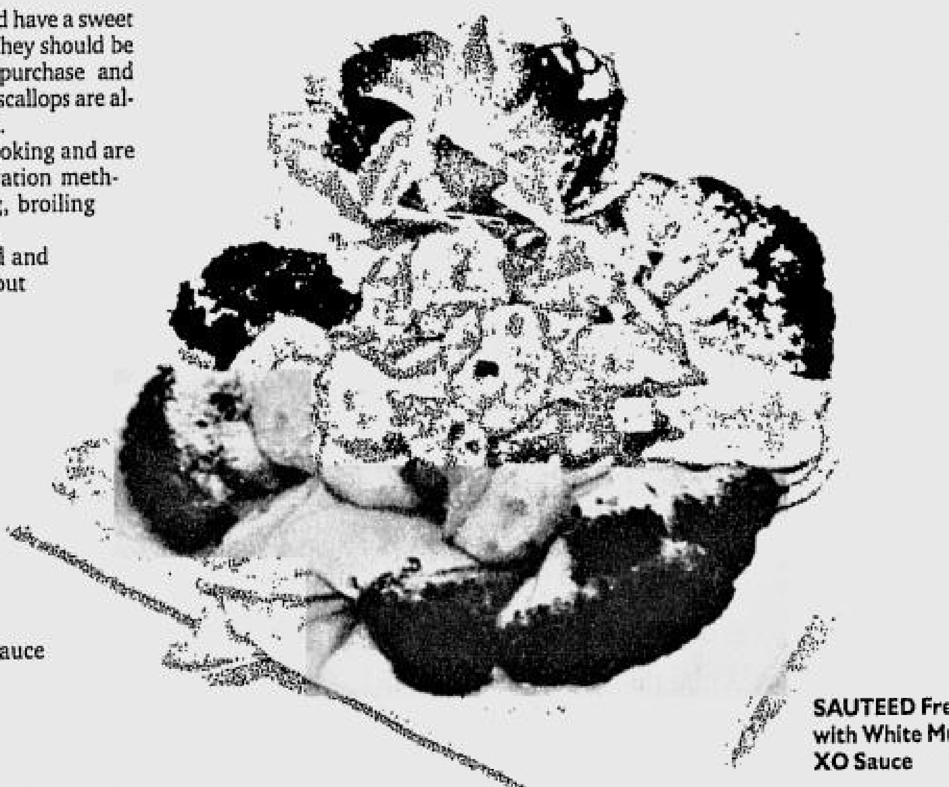
ARRANGE broccoli on a platter. Set aside.



IN a wok, blanch the broccoli with salt and soya oil.

TRANSFER white mushrooms and scallops to the plate with the broccoli.

GARNISH with flowers and serve.



SAUTEED Fresh Scallops with White Mushroom in XO Sauce

My favorite things and loverly recipes

From page E1

Society of Jesus, 1961-1984)

Happy Valentine's Day!

Sa tuwing magbubuntis ang asawa ko iba't-ibang pagkain ang nagugustuhan niya... Ngayon siya'y buntis na naman, pinaglilihan niya ang manggang hilaw na may bagoong na bigay ng tiya namin na galing pa sa Thailand. *Palagay ko ay hindi na sariwa ang bagoong kasi may kunting amag na. Mareremedyuhan pa ba ito? Mam may maibibigay po ba kayong* "bagoong dip recipe" *na pareho sa* Thailand?

ALBERT

Kung ang pagkain ay may amag na, ang tanging remedyo ay itapon sa basura. Paginamag na, ang ibig sabihin ay bulok na!

The dip from Thailand that is used for green mangoes is called Nam Prik Pow. Here's the recipe. Enjoy!

Nam Prik Pow

4 tbsp oil
¼ c chopped garlic
¼ c garlic
3 tbsp coarsely chopped dried red chilies
¼ c unsauteed and salted *alamang* (fermented shrimp paste)
3 tbsp +/- palm or brown sugar

Heat the oil. Add the garlic and shallots and fry briefly. Remove from, the oil and set aside. Add the chilies and fry until they start to change color, then remove them and set aside.

In a mortar and pestle pound the shrimp paste. Add the chilies, garlic and shallots, blending each in before adding the next. Then over low heat return all the ingredients to the oil until a thick paste forms.

The sauce should be thick, slightly oily, with a reddish-black color. Adjust chilies, sugar and *alamang* to taste.

Dear Reggie,

I'm so in love with my girlfriend I promised to cook for her on our second month anniversary. Can you give me a recipe that is comparable to heaven on earth? Since we both love fried chicken, can you please give me a "heaven and earth" fried chicken recipe that I can cook for her?

MIGUEL LOPEZ

It would be extremely presumptuous of me to even think that I know how chicken tastes in heaven. Just the same, here's an excellent recipe called Chicken from Heaven with Mushroom Gravy from Earth. May the experience of cooking for her be ecstatic and may you continue to sing words of eternal love 'til your 10th year...or we can change its name to Devil Fried Chicken with Mushroom Gravy from Hell!

Chicken from Heaven

1 kg chicken wings or legs
Marinade:
1 c sour cream
1 tsp salt
½ tsp pepper

In a bowl combine the following:
1 c flour
1 tsp Texas Jack or Seasoned Salt
1 tsp salt
½ tsp pepper

Mushroom gravy:
¼ c butter
2 tsp chopped garlic
1/3 c sliced leeks, green part
1/3 c sliced leeks, white part
1 c sliced button mushrooms
3 tsp brown sauce or gravy mix
salt and pepper to taste
1 tbsp flour
1 ½ c of fresh milk

Dredge marinated chicken in the flour mixture and deep fry in hot oil.

Gravy: In a saucepan, melt butter and whisk flour. Add garlic and all the other ingredients. Gently whisk with milk. Simmer until thick. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Mag-merienda Araw-araw!

New resto branches, Chinese New Year specials

LUCKY sweet *tikoy* of fine quality ingredients is sold at Jade Garden and Peking Garden.

DINING OUT

SUPER BOWL of China has opened a branch at 2/L, SM City North Edsa. The restaurant offers variety and value-for-money. Among the popular dishes are Crispy Noodles with assorted seafood and Braised Birthday Noodles.

Best-selling rice toppings are Lapu-Lapu Fillet with Taosi on Rice, Assorted Seafood on Rice, Sweet and Sour Pork on Rice, Hot Pot Rice with Pork Ribs and Chicken Feet.

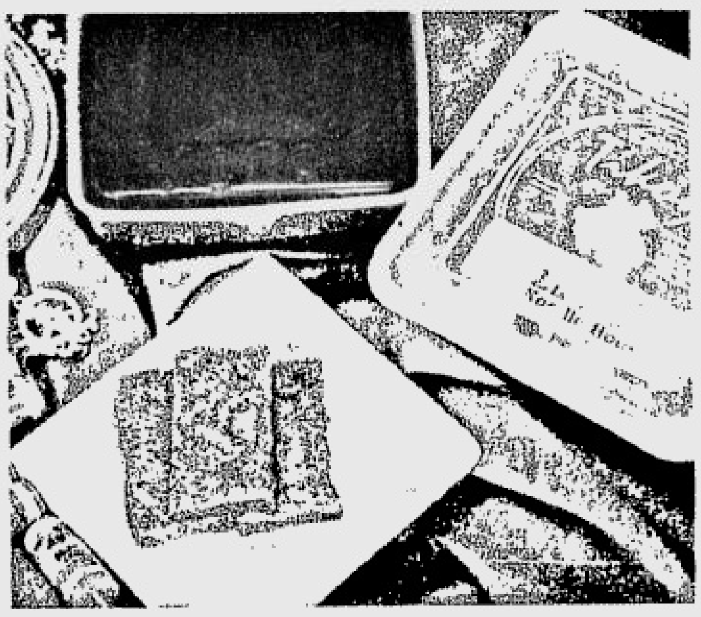
Super Bowl's entrees include Crispy Lemon Chicken, Szechuan Prawns, Sweet and Sour Pork, Deep-fried Spicy Prawns with Garlic, Beef Fillet Chinese-style and Super Bowl Pork Chop.

PEKING GARDEN, which serves northern Chinese cuisine, has prepared a "lucky" set menu for 12 persons to welcome the Year of the Monkey. The set menu has four kinds of appetizer, shark's fin soup with fish tip and golden mushrooms, Peking duck, prawns with sweet and spicy sauce, braised dried oysters with sea moss and lettuce, steamed Norway golden carp fish, deep-fried peppercorn crabs, two-tone rice topping, steamed supreme soup and pork dumplings, and chilled mango shake with sago for dessert, all for P9,338+.

An affiliate of Maxim's Restaurants Hong Kong, Peking Garden is at 2/L Glorietta 2, Ayala Center, Makati. Call 8179066/67 or 8179130.

THE COURTYARD'S Beef Tenderloin tips in brown sauce

ITALIANNI'S Restaurant offers quick yet tasty meals. Try the new Pasta Combos now available at its branches in Glorietta IV, Alabang Town Center and SM City Bicutan. The combo includes Mushroom Fettuccine Alfredo with Honey Herb Roasted Chicken, Spaghetti Pomodoro with Grilled Pesto Chicken Breast, and the Linguini Pesto with Romano-crusted Chicken Breast Fillet with Bechamel Sauce, all served with garlic bread and available all day.



LUK Yuen Noodle House offers *tikoy* for dine-in or take-out in celebration of the Chinese Year of the Monkey.

DAVID'S Teahouse has opened its third branch at G/F, Virra Mall Shopping Center in Greenhills, San Juan. The short-order menu includes roasts (duck and white chicken), soy dishes, crabs, shrimps, sea cucumber, eel, snail, clams, pork, beef, vegetable, soup and rice toppings. Photo shows David's Teahouse's Crystal Chicken.

THE COURTYARD on Maria Orosa Street in Malate offers authentic Chinese cuisine. Included in its menu are Pork Brain Nuggets, Drunken Chicken, seafood dishes like Squirrel Fish, Fresh Lapu-Lapu in Soy Sauce, Com Pao Prawns and Shrimps Clear as Crystal. There's also Tofu, Crispy Chili Squid and Braised Pork Knuckles. Call 5361924.

THE WESTIN Philippine Plaza's China Sea Restaurant offers Chinese New Year set menus for lunch and dinner. It also serves the Fortune Fish (Steamed Hong Kong Fish in Mushroom Sauce). Call 5515555 local 1528.

JADE Garden's chefs from Hong Kong have prepared New Year lucky set menus for 12 persons.

The set menu includes suckling pig and roasted meat combination, abalone/shark's fin soup with sea cucumber and fish lip, *fat choy hoe si* (imported dried oyster with sea moss), steamed *lapu-lapu*, barbecued Peking duck, peppercorn crabs, he he ha ha (shrimps with e-fu noodles for happiness), yeung chow fried rice, and desserts of mango shake with *sago* and sweet dim sum pastries.

On sale now is Jade Garden's *tikoy*. A free box of *tikoy* also comes with every purchase of five boxes. Offer good while supply lasts.

Jade Garden, an affiliate of Maxim's Restaurants Hong Kong, is at Greenbelt 1, Ayala Center, Makati. Call 8124518 or 8922319.

LUK Yuen offers *tikoy*, the well-known Chinese New Year "lucky" food. The special *tikoy* is available for dine-in or take out (in reusable microwaveable plastic boxes).

Luk Yuen's newly renovated Greenhills branch now serves short orders for lunch and dinner. Other branches are at Glorietta 2, Ayala Center (8671394/95); Cash & Carry, Buendia, Makati; SM Megamall B Basement; and Makati Supermart Alabang.

Mag-merienda
Araw-araw!
P32

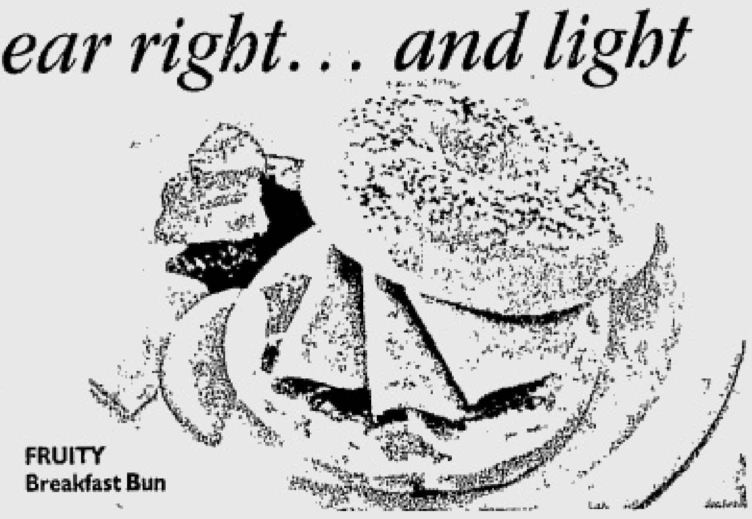
Start the year right… and light

IT'S time to trim waistlines and shed the extra pounds gained over the holidays by eating light.

Don't worry, less calories does not mean dry, dull or tasteless. San Miguel Purefoods has some light yet tasty and satisfying dishes.

Start the day with the quick and easy Fruity Breakfast Bun. For lunch, have Grilled Chicken with Mushroom Gravy and for dinner, a hot, steamy bowl of Hototay and skewers of Seafood Brochette.

For more recipes and help in the kitchen, log on to www.mygreatfood.com or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to San Miguel Purefoods Culinary Center, Legaspi cor. Eagle Sts., Barrio Ugong, Pasig.



FRUITY Breakfast Bun

Fruity Breakfast Bun

1 250-g pack Purefoods Bologna
½ c Magnolia Cream Cheese Spread
1/3 c strawberry jam
6 pcs bread of choice (such as bagel, English muffin, etc.)

Split bread into two. Reheat bread in the oven according to package directions.

Combine cream cheese spread with strawberry jam. Mix well. Spread mixture on split side of the bread. Top with a slice of bologna. Cover with other half of the bread.

Makes six sandwiches.

Grilled Chicken with Mushroom Gravy

500 g Magnolia Chicken Breast Fillet
4 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp Magnolia Gold Butter
1 tbsp garlic, minced
½ c fresh button mushrooms, sliced
½ c oyster mushrooms sliced, with stems removed
½ c abalone mushrooms sliced and stems removed
2 tbsp all-purpose flour
½ c red wine
1 c chicken stock
¼ c all-purpose cream
1 tbsp parsley, chopped
salt and pepper

Brush the chicken breasts with olive oil then season with salt and pepper. Grill chicken. Serve with mushroom gravy on the side.

On a heated saucepan, melt butter then sauté the garlic and mushrooms. Pour in red wine then simmer until red wine is reduced to ½. Add the chicken stock then let it boil again. Simmer for about five minutes. Remove from heat then stir in the parsley and cream. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Makes three to four servings.

Hototay

¼ c oil
1 pc onion, sliced
125 g Monterey pork *kasim*, cut into strips
¾ c (75 g) peeled shrimps
¾ c (75 g) fishballs, halved
10 c broth (choice of beef, chicken and pork stock)
5 pcs dried Chinese mushrooms, soaked and sliced
1 pc carrot, sliced into strips
½ c (30 g) *chicharo*
½ c (75 g) sliced Monterey pork liver
2 tsp salt
1 ½ tbsp oyster sauce
1 tsp pepper
½ head Chinese *pechay*
3 stalks green onions, cut 1" long
3 eggs

Saute onions, pork, shrimps and fishballs. Pour in broth and let boil. Add mushrooms, carrots, *chicharo* and pork liver. Cook for three minutes then season with salt, oyster sauce and pepper. Remove from heat then add *pechay* and spring onions. Right before serving, break eggs directly into soup and stir a little. Serves five-seven.

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Our Team

Chef Norbert Gandler	Director of Culinary Arts and Pastry & Bakery Arts
Chef Ulrich Willimann	Asst. Director for Culinary Arts
Chef Michael Oberle	Asst. Director for Culinary Arts
Chef Manoj de Silva	Asst. Director for Asian Cuisine
Hansjörg Schallenberg	Director of Hotel Operations
Gina Gandler	Director
Joy Peña Schallenberg	Director

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- Pastry & Bakery Arts and Kitchen Management
- Food & Beverage Management & Cost Control

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- 4 months Fundamentals in Pastry and Bakery Arts *(now accepting enrollments for Feb 2004)*
- 4 months Food & Beverage Management Program *(now accepting enrollments for Feb 2004)*
- 2 months Restaurant Service Professionals *(enrollment on-going)*
- Culinary Pro Series *(inquire about our 1-3 day short course program)*

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For more information, call or visit us from 9 to 5 pm, daily from Monday to Saturday
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Cooking classes for beginners

CLASSES at the Reggie Aspiras School of Culinary Arts resume with the Beginner's Series 2004.

Jan. 17 (Saturday)—Gourmet Breakfast (all new, special class): pancake and waffle bar (learn six different variations with all-new homemade syrups and fruit sauces); breakfast steaks and sausages; egg variations (omelets and scrambled eggs gourmet style); breakfast casserole; fruit juices. Over 14 recipes. (P2,800 + ingredients).

Jan. 19 (Monday)—Authentic Japanese 101: Miso Soup with Snow Mushroom Salad, Chawan Mushi (Egg Custard), Sukiyaki, 2 Bento Box Meals, Grilled Gindara and Chicken Teriyaki with side dishes, Kobe Steak Cooked Misono Style with dipping sauces and Japanese fried rice, fruit gelatin.

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Fee is P1,500 per session (excluding ingredients).

Call 9289296 or 9273008 (Cynthia); 6335162 or 6474744 (Julius).

Mag-merienda
Araw-araw!

Effective public safety laws needed

THE CONSUMER

Marietta Velasco Giron

THE SPATE of accidents in public places raises the question of whether or not we have public safety laws. "Who's to blame" is always what everyone is asking.

For instance, who was held responsible for that tragic accident when a passenger jeepney fell into a gaping hole in front of a building being constructed along Edsa? Was it the Department of Public Works and Highways or the private construction company that failed to install appropriate safety barriers? What about when vehicles land on their side or turn-turtle after hitting potholes and traffic obstructions?

And speaking of public safety, in shopping malls, escalators used to be accidents waiting to happen until that fateful day when a kid was hurt while going to the upper level of the mall. The last we heard was the shopping mall was passing the blame to the escalator installer.

The e-mail sent to us last week by Ma. Nora Soriano about her cousin's bad fall at a Kenny Rogers branch is another case in point. Her cousin, she said, was leaving the fast food joint when she slipped on the wet floor being mopped by cleaners.

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"My cousin and her working mother had to be absent from work, and their absence meant salary deductions. We also worry that the head injury may have repercussions. Would the food establishment assume further responsibility?"

Soriano's mother (a former food and nutrition professor) commented, "It is against good manners to clean the premises while someone is eating."

Kenny Rogers explains

Grace Velez, assistant manager of the KR branch in SM North, explained that the incident happened about 10:30 p.m. Cleaning time in the restaurant is 10-11 p.m. with members of the cleaning staff being assigned sections that are blocked off by chairs. Warning signs saying "wet floor" are displayed. In addition, the cleaning crew, as well as the guard at the door, also verbally warns customers.

Coin 'monster'

Romina Austria, a reporter of the Philippine News Agency, asked us to call the attention of the owner/operator of a coffee-chocolate dispensing machine with a defective coin slot. "The machine has long been defective. Coins always get stuck in the slot. For instance, I recently inserted a P10 coin for a hot choco-drink. No drink was dispensed, and only P5 was returned by the machine. My colleagues have been experiencing the same thing."

Busted water pipe

In spite of the warning about an impending water shortage, a busted pipe near the corner of Singalong and San Andres streets in Malate in front of a new townhouse complex remains unattended for several weeks now. Residents are calling the attention of Maynilad. "The problem started before Christmas, and it is obviously coming from busted Maynilad pipes because the water is clear," a concerned resident told us.

Complaints desks

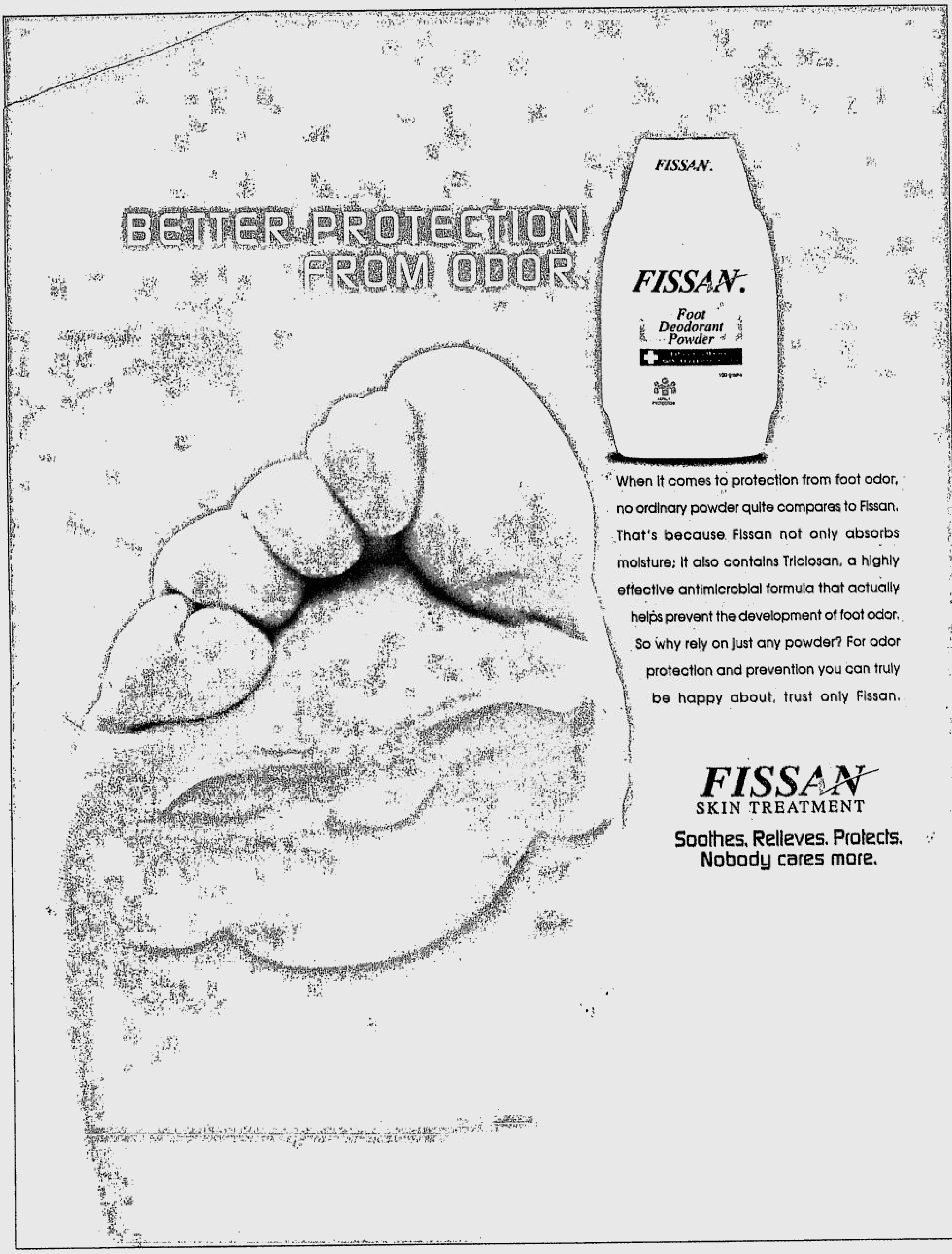
A letter-writer asked for the telephone number of the consumer welfare desk in Caloocan. According to him, he bought a defective gadget in a hardware. The store owner refused to replace the gadget or refund his money.

We advise him to call the local government unit and ask for advice from its consumer welfare desk. Concerns that may be brought to the desk include foods in restaurants and eateries, defective sidewalks, defective weights and measures, violation of provisions of the Local Government Code.

The telephone number of LGU-Caloocan is 2872123. Contact person is Alfredo Gallauran.

We thank Yolanda V. Marquina (officer-in-charge of the Department of Trade and Industry consumer welfare desk) for the information. For further inquiries, call her up at 8904932 or 8965740.

E-mail the author at mgiron@i-manila.com.ph



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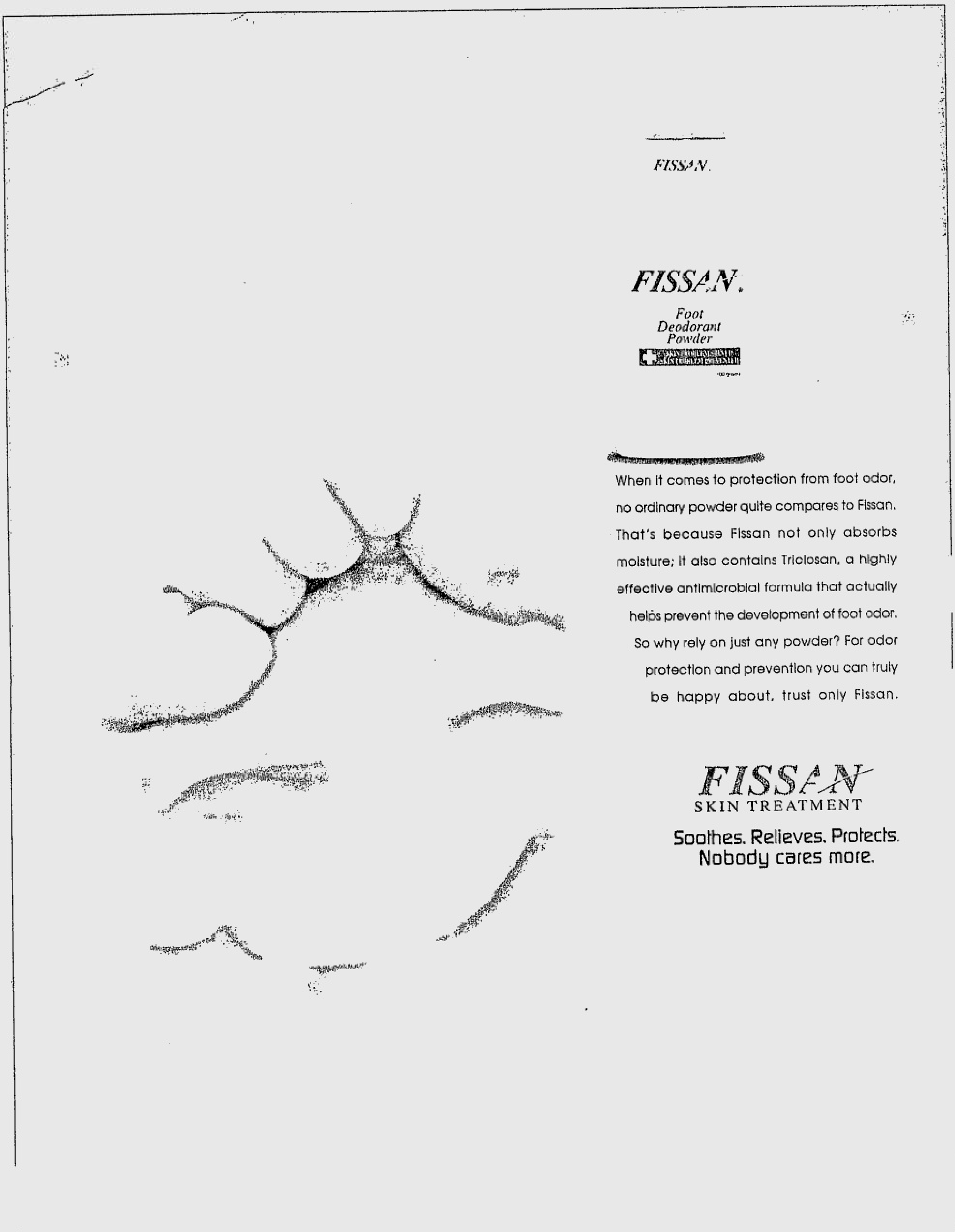
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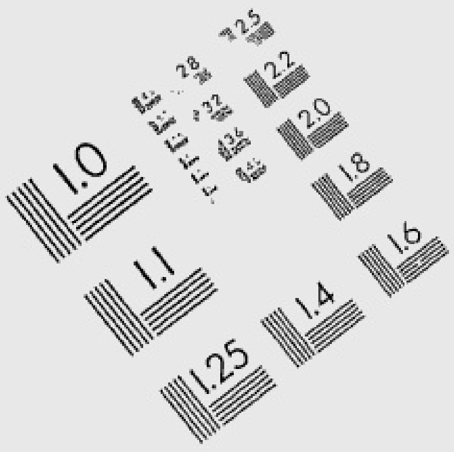
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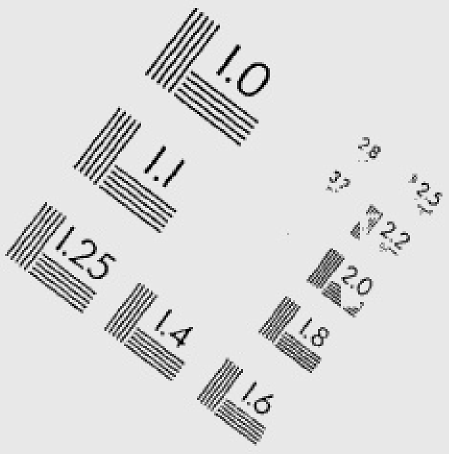
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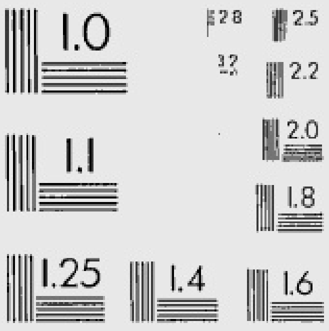
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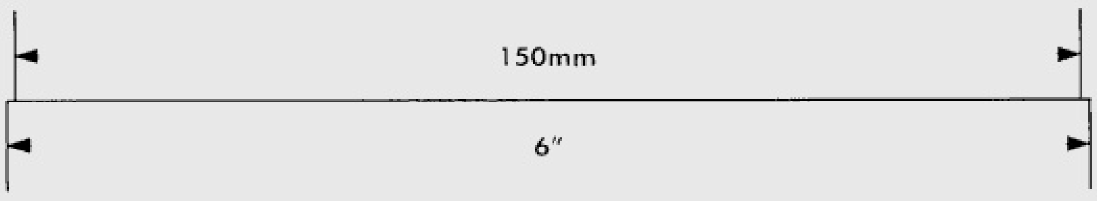

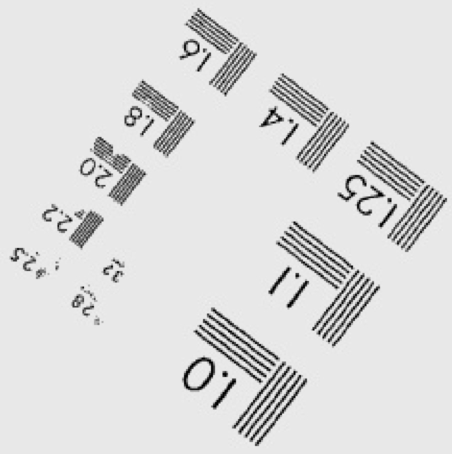
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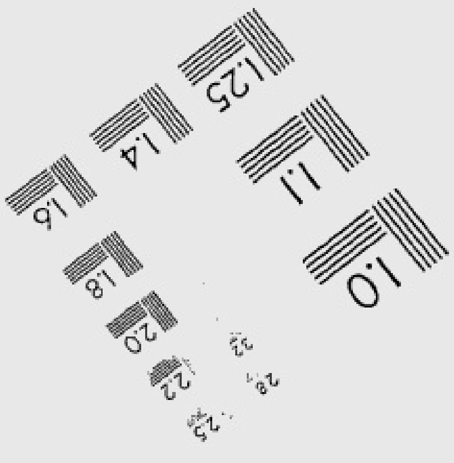
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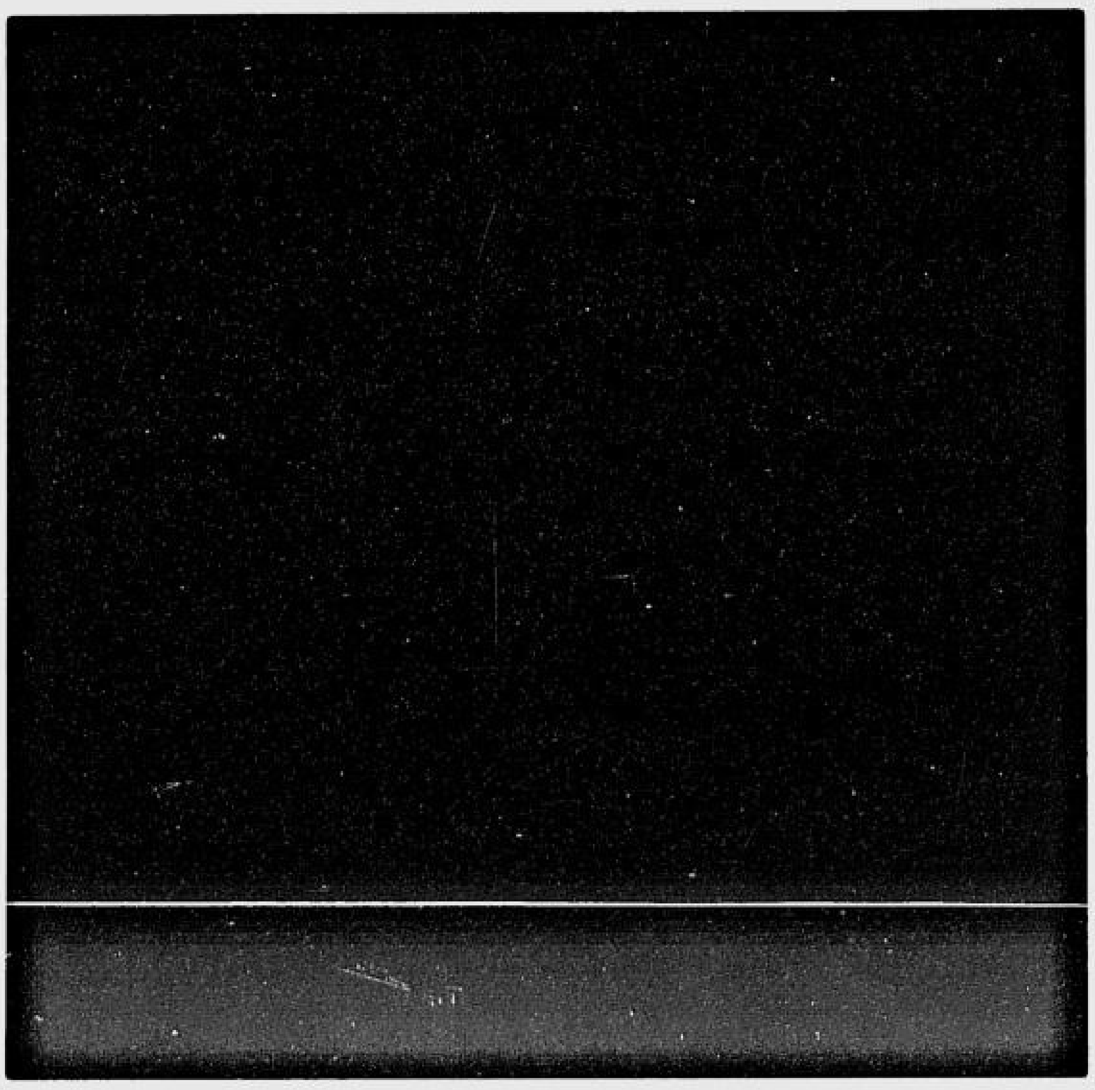

END

PLEASE REWIND